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Rod Serling's
THE TWILIGHT ZONE
Magazine

December 1988

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INSIDE THE NEW "ZONE"

FANTASY TV PREVIEW

ROD SERLING TELEPLAY

30TH ANNIVERSARY QUIZ



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NEW FICTION
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THE Rod Serling's TWILIGHT ZONE Magazine

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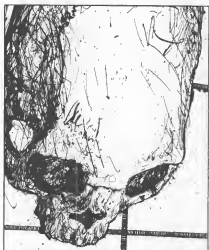
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IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE



Rod Serling

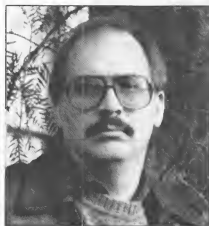
Although Rod Serling achieved recognition as a screenwriter, producer, activist, and educator, he was, at heart, a storyteller. Like those ancient yarn-spinners who told tall tales around a campfire, Serling could fill our ordinary lives with wonder and terror with the turn of a phrase. Yet because he understood the magic of the new medium of television, his circle of listeners now numbers in the hundreds of millions, and his tales have achieved a kind of immortality.

In creating this special Rod Serling Tribute Issue, we've attempted to recognize his special gift in a number of ways. First, we offer a prime example of Serling's own storytelling talent with a never-before-published teleplay from the original *Twilight Zone* series, "King Nine Will Not Return." Next, we've included an exclusive color preview by J. Michael Straczynski of the new version of *The Twilight Zone* television series which debuts this fall in syndication, as well as a Fall Fantasy TV Preview by TZ Hollywood correspondent Craig Miller, focusing on the new anthology programs which have followed in Rod Serling's footsteps. Add to that a special message from Associate Publisher Carol Serling, and our *Twilight Zone* 30th Anniversary Ultimate Trivia Quiz, and you have a fitting tribute to the man whose tales have given us all so many enjoyable hours of entertainment.

Of course, tales of terror have changed profoundly since Rod Serling's era. Last issue we profiled a new generation of horror writers (sometimes referred to as "splatterpunks") who are challenging the traditional limits of the form. As a follow-up to that article, this issue features solo efforts by two of the movement's most successful authors—Craig Spector and John Skipp. They are included in their next book, *Deadlines*, which weaves several of their most powerful stories into a terrifying tale of a writer who comes back from the dead. There's also the conclusion of David J. Schow's novella "The Falling Man," about a filmmaker's descent into a waking nightmare. Schow, author of *The Kill Riff*, has just finished a new novel, *The Shift*; to be published next fall by Tor Books.

Naturally, there's always room for more conventional kinds of terror in *The Twilight Zone*. In keeping with a long-standing TZ tradition, we offer you three tales of Halloween horror. Bruce Taylor, author of "Perfect Disguises," first appeared in Robert Silverberg's *New Dimensions* anthologies. Since then he's published several short stories, most recently in the new Seattle magazine *Pulphouse*. Darrell Schweitzer ("...Pumpkin Head Dolls") last appeared in TZ with "Jungle Eyes" (July 1985). Schweitzer, who has been selling short fiction since the early 1970s, recently became co-editor of the revived pulp magazine *Weird Tales*. John Tibbetts, author of "Overtime," this issue's TZ First, has published several nonfiction works, including *The Films of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.* A native of Kansas, Tibbetts is currently entertainment editor of KCTV in Kansas City, and enjoys playing piano accompaniment to silent films as a hobby. To round out the issue, we've included a TZ Interview with filmmaker David Cronenberg on the set of his new film *Dead Ringers*, as well as an "Other Dimensions" essay by Jennifer Steinhauer on the rumored return of the late, great Elvis Presley. Steinhauer, a TZ journalism intern from the School of Visual Arts in New York City, also researched and wrote our "Ultimate Trivia Quiz" this issue.

One final note: We'd appreciate it if you could take the time to fill out the Reader Ballot on page thirteen. It's your opportunity to let us know what you think of our "new look" and to vote for your favorite "TZ First" story of the year. We're looking forward to hearing from you, and to seeing you again next time! ■



J. Michael Straczynski



Skipp, Schow, and Spector

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Welcome to *The Twilight Zone*!

To all of you reading these words—our long-time readers, newcomers who have just discovered us, and especially those of you who have returned to *The Twilight Zone* with this issue—I'd like to extend to you my warmest welcome. The year ahead will be a very exciting one for fans of the "Zone." This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the creation of *The Twilight Zone*, inaugurating a year-long celebration of Rod Serling's life and legacy. A new, syndicated version of *The Twilight Zone* debuts this fall. And, on October 7, a star on Hollywood's legendary "Walk of Fame" will be dedicated in Rod Serling's honor. To me, the enduring popularity of Rod's special vision is a testimony to one idea: That the world is filled with possibilities, if only we stop to see them. That people *can* make a difference.

Thirty years ago, Rod Serling typed the words "THE TWILIGHT ZONE" for the first time on a script entitled "The Time Element" and sent it to CBS as a concept for a new series that combined the ordinary and the astonishing. The audience reaction to that teleplay was so enthusiastic that it convinced the network brass and the "soap sellers" that tales of fantasy and imagination were a viable option for television. The first *Twilight Zone* episode aired a year later. Soon after, that same "power of the people" (in the form of an avalanche of letters) convinced the network that canceling the program would be a mistake. The rest is history, for the show has been on the air continuously ever since, and Rod Serling's vision is now a part of our culture.

(In fact, I've been collecting references to Rod Serling and *The Twilight Zone* for some time. You may have seen Robin Williams' "Zone" improvisation in *Good Morning, Vietnam*, or Johnny Carson's impression of Michael Dukakis as Rod Serling on the *Tonight Show*, or the "Highlight Zone" on ABC Sports. If you've seen any recent examples, please drop me a line at the "Zone File" in care of this magazine.)

"People power" is also what this special Rod Serling Tribute Issue is all about. Your letters and comments about the magazine have been put to good use, and we've made a few changes in our format to give you the features you've requested most. We'll be publishing original *Twilight Zone* teleplays in every issue, and you'll also find our new "Inside the Zone" feature, giving background information on the new version of the television show. We'll also be featuring regular coverage of Rod Serling and the original series, as well as contests and quizzes to test your knowledge of "Zone" lore. And, beginning next issue, we resume our show-by-show guide to *Rod Serling's Night Gallery*.

We'll be continuing those features you've come to expect from us—book and film reviews, movie and television previews, and profiles of the writers, artists, and filmmakers who make our dreams into reality. And, of course, you'll always find outstanding fiction here, in the classic *Twilight Zone* tradition—by both the masters of the form, and new discoveries in our ongoing "TZ First" program. I hope you enjoy the new emphasis. The bottom line is: It's your magazine. People do have the power to influence and change things, so please keep in touch.

In closing, I'd like to offer my own tribute to all of you who have continued to believe in the dream Rod Serling spoke of in the closing narration to one of his most memorable stories:

"To the wishes that come true, to the strange mystic strength of the human animal, who can take a wishful dream and give it a dimension of its own.... It can happen—in the Twilight Zone..."

CAROL SERLING
Associate Publisher

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THE TWILIGHT ZONE
Magazine

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SPOTLIGHT ON ROD SERLING

**A close-up look at the ceremonies honoring
The *Twilight Zone*'s creator.**

IN THE AFTERNOON OF October 7, 1988, a new star will join the firmament of Hollywood's immortals. At ceremonies on Hollywood Boulevard, Carol Serling and representatives from the new syndicated *Twilight Zone* television series will take part in the unveiling of a star in Rod Serling's honor on Hollywood's fabled "Walk of Fame." Serling's star will rest alongside other noted writer-producers, including John Houston, Alfred Hitchcock, and Orson Welles, as well as performers from Lawrence Olivier and Charlie Chaplin to Boris Karloff and Groucho Marx. As it happens, The Walk of Fame, sponsored by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary this year, just like the original *Twilight Zone* series.

The original *Twilight Zone* was a remarkable breakthrough for its time. In an era of bland sitcoms and hokey horse operas, the show offered a break from conformity; a breath of fresh air, a sense of the limitless power of the human imagination. Unlike early fantasy series, which were aimed only at hardcore fans, *The Twilight Zone* made the fantastic accessible by taking the viewer across the boundary between light and shadow. It made the magical real by putting it in universal terms anyone could understand. This same principle is behind the work of many of today's most popular storytellers—from Steven Spielberg to Stephen King—who freely admit their debt to Rod Serling's genius.

Although Rod Serling's name will forever be connected with *The Twilight Zone*, his star recognizes far more than one series. Winner of six Emmy Awards, Rod Serling was one of a handful of brilliant young writers who helped shape the television medium into the force it is today. His award-winning teleplays, including "Patterns," "The Rack," and "Requiem for a Heavyweight," are recognized as landmarks in live television drama. And Serling was also an accomplished



screenwriter as well, writing scripts for such films as *Seven Days in May*, *Planet of the Apes*, and *The Man*.

But the Hollywood star is awarded for more than talent. According to the guidelines of the board which approves each new star, the recipient must have made a unique contribution not only to the entertainment field, but to all of humanity. Throughout his life, Rod Serling was passionately devoted to the cause of human rights. In fact, it's said that he chose to leave a high-paying career as an independent screenwriter to write and produce *The Twilight Zone* because of his continuous clashes with network censors over the political and social commentary in his work. In those wary

days in the aftermath of the McCarthy Era, *The Twilight Zone* provided Serling and his colleagues a forum to comment on the social issues of the day.

When another writer/producer—Gene Roddenberry, creator of *Star Trek*—recently received his own "star" on the Walk of Fame, he remarked that he believed Rod Serling should have received his honor first. In a eulogy shortly after Rod Serling's untimely death at the age of fifty in 1975, Roddenberry paid tribute to Rod Serling's legacy:

No one could know Serling, or view or read his work, without recognizing his deep affection for humanity, his sympathetically enthusiastic curiosity about us, and his determination to enlarge our horizons by giving us a better understanding of ourselves. . . . He dreamed of much for us, and demanded much of himself, perhaps more than was possible for either in this time and place. But it is that quality of dreams and demands that makes the ones like Rod Serling rare. . . . and always irreplaceable.



BOOKS

EDWARD BRYANT

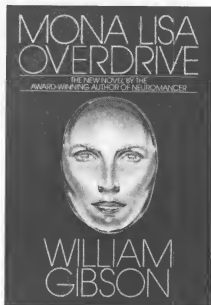
Cybernovels, Winter's Tales, and other dark voyages

William Gibson demonstrates in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (Bantam Spectra, \$18.95, 272 pp., ISBN 0-553-05250-0) that he has a lot of balls. He shows us also that he can adroitly keep those balls juggled all in the air at the same time. It's a neat feat that should entrance the hundreds of thousands of readers who found themselves hypnotized by the supercharged prose and mirror-sharded surfaces of *Neuromancer* and *Count Zero*.

High in the Nineties Gibson, presently enmeshed in such Hollywood projects as writing scripts for *Alien III* and his own story, *New Rose Hotel*, holds down an enviable spot in contemporary sf. Thus far he is the writer of and for the eighties. The mainstreamers have their McInerney, Ellis, Leavitt, and Janowitz. We're a lot better off. Gibson has brought more excitement, new readers, outside attention, controversy, and just plain much-needed energy to the field than any other new writer of the decade.

He's a tough act to follow, particularly for himself. So how does *Mona Lisa Overdrive* measure up? I'll give it a ninety—it's got a great beat and you can dance to it. In other words, there's no disappointment here. *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, although open-ended in itself, serves as a finely crafted and reader-pleasing climax to the novelistic sequence begun with *Neuromancer* and continued through *Count Zero*. If permissions can be worked out, I'll be surprised if someone doesn't publish a lavish omnibus edition of all three. The trio comprises a legitimate super-novel.

Mona Lisa Overdrive takes place in the now-familiar high-tech cyber-space post-WWIII world where the multinational corporations have expanded into orbit and pretty much run the



world. Hired corporate mercs are far more dangerous than cops, and the gritty streetwise lives of the huge underclass are primarily affected by sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, or at least the author's projections of same.

After *Neuromancer* burst on the scene in 1984, William Gibson was taken to task by some critics for apparently seeming more interested in style and plot than character. The new novel addresses that. Most of the first quarter of the book is devoted to the introduction of new characters, and the re-introduction of some old ones (Molly is back, hurra!). We meet Kumiko Tanaka, alienated young daughter of a mysterious Japanese power-figure; media star Angie Mitchell, who can plug directly into the consensual techno-hallucination of cyberspace without the aid of electronics; ex-con Slick Henry, industrial sculptor par excellence, whose short-term memory, under severe stress, is

slivered into five-minute segments; Mona Lisa herself, a sort of futuristic Val-girl (the Ohio Valley) who has no idea what's going on in this plot (in which she figures centrally), yet is a born survivor. Then there's Gentry, the obsessed computer cowboy, who's trying to figure out the true shape of the cyberspace universe. There is young Colin, a helpful intangible presence generated by a Maas-Neotek biochip. The Count is back—Bobby Newmark—now an adult, and now a human vegetable on life support and plugged into the largest and most enigmatic chunk of software outside the cyberspace matrix. Also returned is the Finn, currently a ghost in the machine. Back too are the metaphorical voodoo gods, the manifestations of various artificial intelligences. And so on.

For the first half of the book, it is virtually impossible to keep track of which character is who, where individual allegiances truly lie, and essentially what's going on. The second half, fortunately, sorts everything out. We discover why it is that certain forces wish to kidnap Angie Mitchell and substitute the surgically modified Mona. We learn what Bobby Newmark is really up to in his pocket universe. We find out Sally/Molly's motives and the true nature of the helpful boy-chip, Colin. Ditto for the big-guy Als, mysteriously maneuvering in both cyberspace and the physical universe.

Just as *Neuromancer* described a fairly standard plot-structure hidden beneath the flash of designer surfaces (Dumas and other romantic adventure writers by way of Alfred Bester, crossbred with the hard-boiled *roman noir* of Chandler and Hammett), so *Mona Lisa Overdrive* betrays traditional roots. The novel has all the labyrinthine plot devices, multiple identities, hairbreadth

BOOKS

escapes, hidden secrets, and dramatic revelations that any nineteenth-century reader could wish for. It also has a satisfying climax and conclusion in which everyone pretty much gets what he or she deserves. William Gibson manages to do all this with a kind of low-temperature elegance that minimizes the melodrama by keeping most of the overt action offstage. This is a technique that should give readers plenty of opportunity for argument.

But the summary of this is that Gibson has come through. He has crafted a cool, exciting, praiseworthy novel that brilliantly pyramids the successes of its predecessors. While other sf writers are still recapping every decade from the thirties up through the present, Gibson is already writing for the nineties and beyond.

Winter's Tales

If Douglas Winter's new anthology *Prime Evil* (New American Library, \$18.95, 322 pp., ISBN 0-453-00572-1) has a word subliminally stamped all over it, that word is "landmark." Everything from the advance publicity to the book jacket (designed by artist Thomas Canty) to the contents page itself suggests none too subtly that surely this volume must be the state-of-the-art showcase for dark fantasy against which all other are measured. So is it? Does it blow such recent competitors as *Dark Forces* and *Cutting Edge* out of the tarn? Nope. That's not to say that *Prime Evil* is in any way a failure. It's more an observation that no single original anthology has yet captured in one volume the full panoply of talent and amazing energy presently propelling the horror boom toward its inevitable peak.

Prime Evil is solid. It contains thirteen stories by solid writers. Most of the contributors also comprise a large share of the top rank, at least sales-wise, of the dark fantasy field. The only real surprises on the contents page are the contributions from Paul Hazel (better known as a non-horrific fantasy novelist) and the welcome introduction to the big time of the small press field's best-kept secret, Thomas Ligotti. As I've also noted with some other recent showcase anthologies, there are no contributors who are female.

The lead story is Stephen King's novelette, "The Night Flier," a dark, wary tale of the star reporter for an *Enquirer*-type tabloid who is hot on the trail of a serial killer. The murderer—who just might be a vampire—is hopping up and down the east coast in a light plane, in an escalating series of

violent raids on small airports. What the story really seems to be about is the recognition of one type of vampire by another. It is a tale of "professional courtesy," if you will, and it succeeds very well as a dark-hued character study.

"Having a Woman at Lunch" is Paul Hazel's too-portentously titled *Ellin*-esque tale of corporate misogyny. Dennis Etchison's "Blood Kiss" reminds us nastily about everyday life in Hollywood and the movie biz. "Coming to Grief" by Clive Barker is an uncharacteristically—and very welcome, for that—gentle story of a haunting. Barker's protagonist, a daughter mourning her dead mother, could easily dwell in a Ramsey Campbell novel. The story demonstrates how wide the author's range is stretching.

Thomas Tessier's "Food" is a well-written, but essentially very traditional, creepy-crawly about a retired editor and a young woman who eats too much, far too much. . . . "The Great God Pan" by M. John Harrison captures a splendidly disturbing quality of sensuality and doom. In "Orange is for Anguish, Blue for Insanity," David Morrell updates Lovecraft's "Color Out of Space" with his account of what drove a

ing years. Ramsey Campbell paints a minimalist portrait of madness in "Next Time You'll Know Me" that's as chilling as what most others would write at thrice the length. "The Pool" by Whitely Strieber is a compressed piece about death, children, and lives beyond this one. It packs considerable effect.

Prime Evil winds up with Jack Cady's novella, "By Reason of Darkness." This is a gritty account of three Viet vets who, twenty years later, have to confront the ghosts of Southeast Asia in a Pacific Northwest wilderness. Cady's a very fine writer, and his talent is showcased in this depiction of a time when the horrors of both war and peace are not dissimilar.

The publisher's publicity takes great delight in pointing out that *Prime Evil* contains Stephen King's only original work to be published in 1988. As it happens, that's wrong. The claim ignores three brand-new King stories in *Night Visions* 5 edited by Douglas Winter (Dark Harvest, \$22.00, 274 pp., ISBN 0-913165-32-8). *Night Visions* is the annual anthology containing approximately thirty thousand words of brand-new fiction by each of three contributors. In the latest volume, Stephen King's colleagues are Dan Simmons and George R.R. Martin. It turns out to be a balanced lineup, with each writer pulling his own weight.

The first of King's contributions, "The Replids," is also the slightest, an attempt to evoke a confusion of alternate worlds that comes across much more as the first chapter of a projected novel than as a free-standing story. "Sneakers" is much more ambitious, though it only holds second place in my list of all-time haunted men's room stories—Skepp and Spector's "Gentlemen" in *The Architecture of Fear* pegging first.

King's novelette "Dedication" is where the real stuff comes in. This is a tale that would not have been out of place in the author's exemplary collection, *Different Seasons*. "Dedication" is a witty story of a black hotel maid in New York and her relationship with a bigoted, best-selling Southern novelist. It is also a gauge of a mother's single-minded dedication to giving her *in utero* son a shot at a worthy future. I'm told that several editors found King's central voodoo plot conceit to be tasteless, gross, disgusting, and further adjectives that, in other contexts, would presumably augur high sales. I've already been disturbed to hear from folks opining about this story without having read it—only from having heard about

CONTINUED ON PAGE 98



prominent nineteenth-century painter mad, and continues to destroy those who research the artist. Peter Straub's "The Juniper Tree" is an exploration of child molestation that could be considered a variant coming-of-age account.

Charles L. Grant takes a fresh look at the hellish possibilities of soul-survival in "Spinning Tales with the Dead." Thomas Ligotti's aging female kid-lit writer in "Alice's Last Adventure" would certainly feel at home in the world of Jonathan Carroll's *Land of Laughs*. It is not a cheerful look at an artist's declin-

SCREEN

GAHAN WILSON

'Toons of Glory: Reflections on the Future of Animation

The chances are excellent that you have already seen *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. In case you haven't, the film concerns the doings of a tough private eye somewhat softened by booze (played with fine, lumpy confusion and a faultless American tough-guy accent by Bob Hoskins), who is disgusted to find himself in the position of having to help a "Toon." (Short for "cartoon," of course, though it also recalls another racial epithet.) Like other oppressed minorities, Toons are considered bizarre by humans, inferior and perhaps even a little disgusting. But they are more or less tolerated—so long as they are kept firmly in their place socially, and confined to their own weird ghetto called Toontown—because it's entertaining to watch their funny doings in "animated" movies and in nightclubs.

The suspect Toon is Roger Rabbit, and he's suspected of having killed a practical-joke manufacturer because the cad played patty-cake (literally) with Roger's super-sexy Toon wife, Jessica, who has enormous liquid breasts, the voice of Kathleen Turner, and claims she's not really bad, she's "just drawn that way."

Of course Roger is innocent. (The worst thing he's done is to crank out a lot of excessively violent cartoon shorts with his cantankerous co-star, Baby Herman.) But the forces of law and order are, unfortunately for him, represented by the sinister and extremely ugly Judge Doom (very nastily and effectively portrayed by Christopher Lloyd with, so far as I am aware, the first artificial Adam's apple sported by a working villain). Judge Doom hates Toons so much that he has gone to the trouble of inventing a greenish mixture of paint removers called Dip, which will dissolve them (ordinarily Toons are, of course, nearly impossible to kill or even damage), and he can't wait to



TRUMP OF DOOM: Is Roger Rabbit classic cartooning's last gasp?

try it out on the unlucky rabbit. As if the Judge were not a nasty enough opponent on his own, he has a pack of evil, zoot-suited weasels to hunt his victims down for him, led by a particularly evil weasel whose accent, laugh, and flattop hat are surely an affectionate tribute to Richard Widmark's rendition of the terrible Tommy Yudo in *The Kiss of Death*.

Roger Rabbit takes place in the late forties and has considerable fun with the detective films of that period, but its essential mood and plot line (plus, of course, its being in color rather than "coloration") owe more to Polanski's *Chinatown* than to those earlier movies. As in that excellent rehash, the underlying plot is an involved, Los Angeles-wide real estate manipulation by numerous biggies, with the core puzzle being to find out which one of them is the biggest and baddest and most pivotal

biggie of them all. And, as in *Chinatown*, the Detective's Big Problem concerns the Terrible Thing that happened in a particularly confusing area of the city, which, in *Roger Rabbit*, is the aforementioned Toontown.

Of course, despite all his attempts to evade it, the plot eventually forces the Detective to visit this dreaded place, and it's here that the best basic gag of the whole movie and its best sequence takes place.

You see, up to this point everything in *Roger Rabbit* has happened in the real world and the Toons are seen as strange beings who contrast strongly—and to their disadvantage—with our environment and with ourselves. All their motions appear to be grotesque and overly plastic next to our own stolid and stuffy—and rather predictable—flesh-and-blood locomotions and maneuverings. Where we clump along,

they zip and ooze; where we bend always at the same joints and tend to maintain the same dimensions, they are elastic, and in their lungings and spurts they spread and sprawl and twist like a can of worms in a panic.

When the Detective goes to Toontown, though (it is approached through a red, animated stage curtain at the end of a dank and dripping real tunnel), the situation is suddenly reversed. Here, *he* is the freakishly ill-moving entity; here, the physical logic of everything he encounters plots against him and makes *him* look silly—and casually endangers him.

The country landscape he drives through bobs and ripples and its singing vegetation distracts him. The city traffic is lunatic and the roads won't stay fixed and the regulations are comic. And, worst of all, his poor, fixed, human form is expected to stand up under the constant whackings and buffetings any cartoon character takes as a matter of course.

His body attempts to adapt to this environment (and much good comic use is made of Hoskins's stocky form as it's alternately hurled onto elevator tops and bottoms and bopped and whopped and otherwise variously brutalized) and now and then it does seem to achieve a close resemblance to that of Elmer Fudd. But it remains stubbornly human despite all the Toontown drubbings (as the Toons remain cartoonish in our own stately world) and the visible wear and tear on it demonstrates graphically why his first encounters with the place drove him to drink.

In time, and within the classic patterns (though bizarrely exaggerated, of course), our Detective solves all his problems, intellectual and emotional, the villain gets his just desserts, the innocent victim is vindicated, and in a slam-bang Wizard-of-Ozian finale, everybody, humans and Toons together, dances off into an animated sunset. I hope you timed your candy and popcorn right.

That all of these odd notions even could be presented on screen, and with something almost like convincingness, is, needless to say, a technical marvel. So far as its literary and dramatic weight is concerned, *Roger Rabbit* is—and I'm sure the people behind it would be the last to deny it (if not, those guys have really lost their sense of humor!)—nothing much more than a pleasant little diversion, a superior way to pass a piece of a steamy summer afternoon in a comfortable air-conditioned theater. But so far as its physical structure is concerned, it's a sort of nutsy eighth won-



LIQUID ASSETS: Roger's big-budget wizardry blends animation and live action...

der of the world, and there's no way it could have happened if the hi-tech fantasy barons of our era hadn't joined forces in a kind of magical working, which is just what they did.

Not only do we have the Disney group in on it under their Touchstone Pictures label, but we have Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, all under the direction of Robert Zemeckis as the movie director and Richard Williams as the animation director. How they got the whole, vast, sprawling thing to work is more than I can say, and I think they'd probably agree with me.

There is no stinting at any point, the animation is excellent and of a quality and fullness rarely encountered nowadays; the special effects would be

staggering if we weren't all so blasé about them by now. Since the cartoon creatures have to lift actual frying pans and open real doors, what had to be done was to first shoot a sort of super version of *The Invisible Man*, with things zooming convincingly through the air and being torn up and eaten and God-knows-what-all, and then appliqué the animated drawings on top of that! The whole thing is, without any doubt at all a species of cinematic miracle.

But, though the surface of *Roger Rabbit* is always bright and jolly (save for its darkly constant and highly effective little analogy on racial prejudice), I'm sure that the more sensitive members of the general movie-going public felt, as I did, the essential *wistfulness* about the whole premise underlying *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. I'm speaking of the "erstwhile-ness," the *used-to-be-ness*, of all those grand, sparkly, horribly brutal and funny old animated shorts from Disney and Warner and all the rest. It must be particularly acute for cartoonists, and not a little depressing. Certainly it was for this cartoonist, and, more than once, watching it, I found myself sighing when they meant to have me laughing, and rather sadly shaking my head when I was supposed to be slapping my knee.

It means well, does *Roger Rabbit*. It loves those old animated cartoons dearly, and the whole thing from start to finish is one long, extended tribute to their magic, but it is also painful in that it most effectively serves as an irrefutable, almost sort of quasi-official, proclamation that those old roughhouse shorts are finally over and done with,



THE AWKWARD AGE: ...but the medium is feeling growing pains.

SCREEN



ROGER AND ROBERT (ZEMECKIS): *Tomorrow's Toons may be composed on computers.*

become an enterprise of the past, nostalgia merely. And I got the clear implication that the basic message of *Roger Rabbit* is that now we've had this final, affectionate, definitive observance, we should stir ourselves and get on to other things. The saddest bit is, I believe they're probably right.

Those grand old cartoons survive on television, of course, but only in perpetual reruns on Saturday mornings in what is essentially an extended wake; a long, long viewing of the dear-departed's corpse. For one who first watched them play on huge screens (you could have spread-eagled ten kids on Bugs Bunny's left white glove) in those magnificent movie houses of yore, it's also more than a little depressing to observe how it never seems to occur to the children laughing at them on TV that the constant interruptions of the commercials are a desecration, not to mention a pain in the ass.

Naturally these vendors of the undead also carefully coffin the old cartoons in cassettes so that the kiddies can make Porky and Donald and all the rest trot through their same routines over and over until the little nippers' patient parents finally snap at the millionth identical racket caused by the Coyote's eternal inability to avoid the Road Runner's patented Acme Trap Number 57 and to fall, clawing at the air and screaming, to a hideous death on the hard, implacable desert floor far below. Or perhaps those parents finally tell their children to stop playing the damned things over and over because they have begun to wonder if it might be just a tad unhealthy and unwise to have their offspring observe Sylvester the Cat's inexhaustible ability to recuperate from the same violent explosion,

and thus be seriously misled as to realistic estimates of their own physical limitations. Or it might even be that it has begun to dawn on them that their offspring might become hopelessly skewed in their future broodings and considerations on mortality if they keep gaping at the reanimated doings of these invulnerable creatures.

Not that the cartoons being cranked out today for the TV market provide any noticeable improvement to a tot's healthy maturation. The main difference, so far as I can see, between the old and the new seems to be that the maimings and slaughters are executed *righteously* these days, instead of for laughs. But I suspect they may do serious aesthetic damage to youngsters who view them, since they are positively depraved artistically, compared to the older works.

It is not so much that the new cartoons are boringly drawn (though they certainly are). The real cheat is that they are only barely animated. Their creatures all have waxen, awkward faces whose features budge only grudgingly. They talk with guarded little stirrings of their lips without moving their jaws or cheeks and, whenever possible, they look out of the corners of their eyes in order to avoid turning their heads. Weirdest of all, their arms and hands and even fingers move independently, without disturbing any other part of them. From the Godzilla-inspired Saturday morning specials to the horrendously uplifting Snoopy prime-time specials, they are basically not animated movies at all, but only rather badly produced radio dramas illustrated with tacky little slide shows.

I should point out that I'm well aware that going on about the quality

of the animation in the Good Old Days is not unakin to the meanderings of Kentucky Colonels about how well those Darkies used to pick the cotton in the fields (and sing such pretty songs to boot!), since the superb quality of the work in that period was the painfully direct result of what amounted to a really spectacular exploitation of the artists on the part of Hollywood moguls. (It wasn't just Joan Crawford they pushed around.)

However, there is hope for the future. Recent advances in computer animation hold out the promise of cartooning that rivals the Golden Age in richness and sophistication—without resorting to slave labor. This art is presently at a tricky pass: I think it's involved in the sort of self-imposed mental trap the Hindus and Buddhists so love to evaporate. In brief, the problem appears to be that the technique of creating the characters seems to have temporarily taken precedence over the creation of the characters themselves.

In computer-generated animation, you build the things by having your computer establish an armature, creating a kind of wicker basket which establishes a basic form, and then you apply a skin over that, very much like stretching the covering over the bare ribs of a model plane, then add coloring and highlights and shading, and the like. Lately, however, people who do these things—and it cuts across separate companies, it's industry-wide—are all doing the same sort of entities, which of course do the same sort of things, and the whole bunch of them are presently trapped in the identical dreary conventions, as if hypnotized by the rote of this operation. I sometimes think I will come close to being impolite if I have to, for instance, see one more gleamingly metallic entity glisten and bobble oddly over a surreal landscape of smooth slumps.

But that will pass. Some clever, creative folk will surely come along and shake things up (I, for instance, would be perfectly willing to shake up anybody interested in paying a reasonable fee for the experience), and the horses will be off again, and they may even be horses, though certainly of a Pegasus kind.

It has, so far, only been the beginning. By and by, we will see such wonders and marvels as will open and transform us until we are barely recognizable. Poor old *Roger Rabbit* and his wacky, silly ilk won't even be in it.

But I'll miss him, all the same. And you too, Daffy. ■

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

30TH ANNIVERSARY ULTIMATE TRIVIA QUIZ

COMPILED BY JENNIFER STEINHAEUER

It's been nearly thirty years since Rod Serling and crew opened the door to alternative entertainment dimensions. Frustrated by the restrictions that traditional television programs imposed on his ideas, Serling created his own universe—The Twilight Zone. As he explored human nature, fantasy and their connection to each other, America sat back and watched with awe. In celebration of that anniversary we have prepared a special quiz to test your knowledge of that "land of substance and shadows." The quiz is divided into four "dimensions" of difficulty, to separate the beginners from the experts. So go ahead. Find out just how much you know about the "Zone."

DIMENSION I: SOMEWHERE IN TIME

[VALUE: 2 POINTS EACH]

Twilight Zone fans know that many of the show's best episodes dealt with time. In some cases, it was in terms of time travel. In others, the episode showed us how the characters were forever changed by their experiences in "other dimensions." Try to supply the appropriate title for each episode summarized below. (Add five bonus points if you can correctly identify the episode written by Richard Matheson, author of the novel that the film *Somewhere in Time* was based on.)

1. A man tries to change past events with the aid of a time machine. But instead of preventing fatalities, he inadvertently causes them.
2. A Western actor finds himself in a real Old West saloon, forced into a showdown with Jesse James, who is upset by the way he has been depicted by modern media.
3. A small girl and her medium-sized dog fall into another dimension on the other side of her bedroom wall. She is barely rescued from eternity by her father.
4. In the future, an old man plans to buy a young body to replace his ailing one. But since he can't afford the same for his wife, he chooses to stay old, and live out his years with her.
5. A bookworm bank teller is delighted to find himself in a post-nuclear-holocaust world, free to read all the books he wants without the scorn of his wife and boss. All seems well until he smashes his glasses and is left alone and blind.

DIMENSION II: ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

[VALUE: 5 POINTS EACH]

Part of the fun in watching the "Zone" is hearing Rod Serling's epilogues at the end of each episode. Some are just plain whimsical, and cause us to smile. But some contain a kernel of truth about ourselves and our society that causes us to think. Below are closing narrations from several TZ episodes. Select the correct teleplay for each ending.

1. "A very small scholastic lesson, from the campus of the Twilight Zone."
 - a. Of Late I Think of Cliffordville
 - b. Short Drink from a Certain Fountain
 - c. The Changing of the Guard
 - d. Night Call



PHOTO 1: Which TZ alumna traded model's slippers for a pair of gumshoes?

Special thanks to Marc Scott Zicree, author of *The Twilight Zone Companion* (Bantam Books), for providing reference material for this quiz.

2. "The evolution of man, the cycle of going from dust to dessert, the metamorphosis from being the ruler of a planet to the ingredient in someone's soup."
 - a. A Nice Place for a Visit
 - b. To Serve Man
 - c. Five Characters in Search of an Exit
 - d. The Invaders
3. "Just who are the people we nod our hellos to as we pass on the street?"
 - a. Mirror Image
 - b. Living Doll
 - c. After Hours
 - d. The Whole Truth
4. "But the cure to some nightmares is not to be found in known medical journals. You look for it under 'potions for bad dreams' to be found in the Twilight Zone."
 - a. Nightmare as a Child
 - b. Nightmare at 20,000 Feet
 - c. Twenty-Two
 - d. The Midnight Sun
5. "And if by chance you should run across him, you had best think only good thoughts."
 - a. It's a Good Life
 - b. From Agnes—with Love
 - c. The Fear
 - d. One for the Angels

DIMENSION III—CLASS OF 1962
[VALUE: 7 POINTS EACH]

For some actors and actresses, *The Twilight Zone* was a stepping stone to other creative planes. Although they didn't appear together in their TZ episodes, many of these talented performers later found themselves working together on other television series. We've listed below some popular television shows of the 1960s and 1970s, along with a selection of TZ alumni. Match each television show with its corresponding "Zone" actor. There are at least two actors or actresses for each show; sometimes three or more.

THE PROGRAMS

- a. *Lost in Space*
- b. *Laugh-In*
- c. *Gunslinger*
- d. *The Rogues*
- e. *Hogan's Heroes*
- f. *Honey West*
- g. *The Beverly Hillbillies*

THE ACTORS

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Gladys Cooper | h. <i>Batman</i> |
| 2. Gig Young | i. <i>My Living Doll</i> |
| 3. Howard Gould | j. <i>Rhoda</i> |
| 4. Julie Newmar | k. <i>Mission: Impossible</i> |
| 5. Agnes Moorhead | l. <i>Bewitched</i> |
| 6. Veronica Cartwright | m. <i>Star Trek</i> |
| 7. Ivan Dixon | |
| 8. Anne Francis | |
| 9. Greg Morris | |
| 10. Robert Cummings | |
| 11. Arne Johnson | 17. Bob Crane |
| 12. Burt Reynolds | 18. Donna Douglas |
| 13. Billy Mumy | 19. Earl Holliman |
| 14. George Takei | 20. Martin Landau |
| 15. Cloris Leachman | 21. Buddy Ebsen |
| 16. Alan Napier | 22. Burgess Meredith |
| | 23. Leonard Nimoy |
| | 24. Jonathan Harris |
| | 25. Alan Seuss |
| | 26. William Shatner |
| | 27. Elizabeth Montgomery |
| | 28. Dennis Weaver |
| | 29. James Doohan |
| | 30. Dick York |
| | 31. Robert Lansing |



PHOTO 2: What future awaited this enterprising young man?

THE FOURTH DIMENSION: PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS
[VALUE: 10 POINTS EACH]

The Fourth Dimension separates the occasional insomniacs from the true "Zoners." Any fan can drop a title or two on command, but few and far between are those who can detail Ida Lupino's costume in "The Sixteen-Millimeter Shrine." Stand back, "Zone" undergrads. These questions are for experts.

1. What four actors in *Twilight Zone—The Movie* were also in original TZ episodes?
2. Although the TZ episode "Living Doll" was credited entirely to Charles Beaumont, who actually wrote it?
3. The *Twilight Zone* episode "Cavender is Coming," presented in 1962, features a then-budding actress, and was based loosely on an event in her life. Name her.
4. Who were the original *Twilight Zone* sponsors?
5. "The Lonely," one of the first TZ episodes, was filmed in a place that was chosen because it resembled an asteroid. Name the location where one-hundred-thirty degree temperatures caused technical difficulties and sick actors.
6. Where did Rod Serling accept a teaching position after *The Twilight Zone* went off the air?
7. Which "Zone" episode takes place partly in a smoke-filled speakeasy?
8. What type of equipment used to film "Time Enough at Last?" caused such controversy that the director of photography had to go to court to explain himself?
9. Which TZ episode used the fewest props?
10. Which episode had the illusion of an automobile crashing into an invisible wall?

ANSWERS ON PAGE 64



DEADLINES

fiction by

CRAIG SPECTOR

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
JAMES STONEBRAKER

Kane was a writer by profession. He made his living telling stories. But the one story he couldn't understand was his father's life. And while there was little he could do about the opening, maybe he could do something about the ending. . . .

Kane watched the old man kill himself for a good fifteen years before he finally got it right.

It took that long, he supposed, to prepare the intricate implements of his destruction: to allow the dissatisfactions, the failures and the unfulfilled dreams of a lifetime to simmer to perfection, like some old secret family recipe.

"The accumulation," his father said, clear as a bell. Kane stood by the big hospital bed and watched his father fumble with the restraints, canvas tentacles tethering his wasted limbs to the cold steel frame. His hair was an ash-white nest of snakes rimming the dome of his skull, static electricity from the sheets making the individual strands waft in the perfectly still air of the ward.

"The accumulation."

His eyes stared quizzically up through the ceiling; even half-focused in fear, they were blue and piercing as shards of ice. They were a fine family trait, like the aquiline nose, and the intelligence and the wit, and the penchant for substance abuse and self-destruction. They had been engaged, for the last few hours or so, in bewildered contemplation of the miracle ►

DEADLINES

undulating before him: a sooty, black snow that drifted in from the corridor and across the ceiling, piling up in zigs and zags and artful swirls and swirls, only to rain down like mist and stick to his fingers like tiny, gummy bugs.

"Don't you see them?" he asked Kane anxiously. "For heaven's sake, they're plain as day."

"I don't see 'em, Dad," Kane replied. "I'm sorry."

It was true. Kane was very sorry, and he really wished he *could* see the black snow, or the gummy bugs, or the endless corridors that stretched out past the walls, or any of the sundry other visions his father had wandered through in the last fifty hours. It might give him a clue to what lay behind the shadowy, fluttering hoods that shaded those icy eyes, a key to unlock the hell his old man had built.

"It's accumulating," his father reiterated, twisting purposefully toward the edge of the bed. "This is terrible."

No shit. And the old man was damned well going to do something about it. He struggled weakly against his bonds, expending what little strength remained in pull after futile pull. Eventually the simple physics of the situation prevailed, and he slumped back against his pillow in defeat. The gaze

he turned back to Kane was that of an ancient, frightened child, encased in a prison of uncomprehending and dying flesh. The straps had left deep, purplish-brown bruises on his wrists and ankles. His upper torso was clad in a johnny harness, its utility disguised in an ugly plaid cloth that was possibly someone's idea of a jaunty robe but more likely somebody's idea of a bad joke. The restraints did their duty: not allowing him to get up, nor turn over, nor allow any limb to touch any other. They kept him centered on the bed.

They kept him under control.

A necessary evil, the night nurse had said. He had pulled out his catheter twice last night; Kane winced even to think about it. Hell, he'd even yanked his IV out four times, all in similar moments of delirium.

But that's what the D.T.s are all about, aren't they? Kane thought bitterly. *Delirium Tremens. Hallucinations. Disorientation. Panic Terror. If the stroke didn't kill him outright, the D.T.s still might. Isn't that what the doctor said? We'll just have to wait and see.*

Kane was tired of waiting. He'd been waiting for a long time now. He wondered if he was a monster for wanting to just get on with it. Or maybe he was just impatient with the meth-

od. Because, when the push came to the shove, Kane's old man had chosen to kill himself the old-fashioned way.

Inch by inch.

He had measured his death each day in his glass, with a squirt of reconstituted lime juice and a dash of club soda. But mostly with an endless, incremental measure of Bowman's Virginia Vodka, which had to rate right up there with Orwell's Victory gin in pure viscosity and brain-rotting vileness. Kane's old man went through a bottle every other day; sometimes more, never less.

Kane could never understand it though he was able to log the ritual in meticulous detail: every morning, some time after hacking up great burbling clots of the previous day's tar 'n' nicotine, but well before lunch, he'd start to drink. A couple of years ago he was able to wait until after lunch, when it became somewhat more respectable, even rakish. But as time wore on, it became harder and harder to resist the urge to sneak just a squeak of it into his coffee. To get the ball rolling.

By early afternoon, it was downhill all the way: lime and soda time, and to hell with the hindmost. The glass would seem almost magical in its ability to maintain its inch of sauce, no matter how many sips he took. Of course, he'd have to freshen it up periodically. But he only really drained it two, maybe three times in a day; hence, if pressed, he could ever claim that he had only two or three drinks a day. It was a neat trick, one that allowed him to damned near buy his own bullshit.

Until now, Kane thought. Kinda hard to deny the fucking hallucinations, isn't it, Dad? Hard to have a mild case of the D.T.s. Like being kinda pregnant.

Or slightly dead. . . .

Kane could hear the *tik-tik-tik* of high heels echoing up the hall. Mother coming, he just knew it. He watched his dad settle into the pillow, watched those tired eyes roll deep into their plum-colored sockets. Out again. The doctors said it might be a reaction to the Librium and the Haldol, or any of the other drugs that formed the narcotic insulation that held his demons at bay. Then again it might be simple swelling of the brain. Kinda hard to tell, until the delirium subsided.

Tik-tik-tik. Any second now. He didn't know if he could handle it; comfort and solace seemed as utterly beyond him as the sun and the moon. He tasted the bile and the frustration welling up somewhere deep inside, and contemplated spewing it out even as he

"A man only has four pleasures in this life," Kane's father said. "Food . . .

Sex . . . Smoke . . . and Drink." Kane couldn't believe his ears. It was a lunatic reasoning, like listening to Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster, going "MMMMM . . . Food, good . . . Drink, good . . . Fire, BAAADDD. . ."



understood the essential pointlessness of the act. Why bother? At this late stage, it would be like kicking sick puppies. Anger would accomplish nothing, and solve even less. There was nothing left to do with it.

And nowhere for it to go.

But closer, ever closer.

To the deadline....

EXPLANATIONS WERE ALWAYS CHEAP, ALWAYS plentiful, and always off the mark. The socially acceptable suicides were like that. If you were a misanthrope, at least, it was different: if you ate the bullet or stuck your head in the oven or jumped off a bridge, you were usually left a note, some pathetically touching, unheeded cry for help. Tsk-tsk. Everyone knew your number.

But if, on the other hand, you subscribed to the approved methodology, note-leaving was unthinkable. After all, that implied choice. You couldn't suck down two packs a day for twenty or thirty years and then pin a note to your lapel, now could you? And you couldn't very well be expected to piss on such great American institutions as the happy hour.

No, the upright suicides were a different breed. They built the instruments of their destruction bit by bit, so that when those suckers finally fired up it was almost like a miracle, almost like an accident.

And they left their notes, such as they were, pinned to the people they left behind. You didn't so much see them as feel them, probing like blind fingers over braille, reading the bumps of the ritual scarification. Playing connect-the-dots with the moments of a lifetime.

This, of course, led to endless speculations, endless reading of clues. The old man had no coping mechanism. The old man just gave up trying. Booze did it. Smoking did it. Stress did it. De Debbil did it. The list went on and on. Kane always figured that if he had to pick, it would have to be *all of the above* and more. Much more.

Now that it was in his face, Kane saw a whole 'nother reason altogether.

Deadline: (*ded-lin*) *n.* 1. A time limit, as for the completion of newspaper copy or other work, payment of debts, etc. 2. Originally, within the limits of a prison, a boundary line that a prisoner might not cross under penalty of death.

IT SEEMED AS THOUGH THE TORTURE WOULD never end.

First, the stroke; number two, with

Six inches
from his father's
gristled, swollen
face, holding the
claw of his frozen
left hand and staring
into those eyes with
only the hiss and
burbles of medical
machinery for accompaniment, Kane
couldn't tell if his father even
knew who he was.



a bullet. He'd been warned; number one hit the charts five years ago, and he got off with no paralysis, no impairment, a clean bill of health. His doctors told him he was incredibly lucky, give up the cigarettes and the booze and the fatty foods and he'd live another twenty years.

He took their advice, for a couple of months. Then he went back.

To the old ways.

"You can't keep this up," Kane told him. It was one of their "home from college man-to-man late-night drink 'n' rap" sessions: Kane downing too many beers while his father nursed the bottomless inch-deep pool in his glass. A great time for honest forthrightness and candor. "You'll die if you do. Is that what you want?"

"I'll die anyway," his father replied.

"Yeah, but this way you'll die sooner."

"Listen, little buddy," Kane's father said authoritatively, using a tone that he was sure reeked of wisdom but to Kane simply reeked. "A man only has four pleasures in this life... Food... Sex... Smoke... and Drink."

Kane couldn't believe his ears. It was a lunatic reasoning, like listening to Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster, going "MMMM... Food, good... Drink, good... Fire, BAAAAA... It

was nuts.

He watched as his father sucked in a thick acrid plume off a Winchester cigarillo. He actually inhaled it; Christ, he thought, who inhales cigar smoke? It was the smoker's equivalent of mainlining. He exhaled in a violent coughing fit, as if something wanted out of his chest desperately. Kane watched him contort, choke, and gradually bring it under control.

"Anyway," his father grumbled, "the doctors say I can't have the first one anymore, and I'm sure as hell not getting any of the second."

He gestured back toward Mother's bedroom; Kane rolled his eyes. "So you'd rather die, is that it?"

"I don't know," his father sighed, "but I'll tell you this much. Every once in a while I think to myself: if I could go to sleep tonight and just never wake up at all, that would be just fine."

Their eyes met then, for the first time in ages: two souls exchanging glances as they passed in the night; one going up, the other down. Kane didn't often look at his father anymore. It was too uncomfortable; it was like staring at a ghost. He killed off the last of his beer and took a long deep breath before answering.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 81

I'VE BEEN WAITING ALL MY LIFE TO MEET YOU

I WANDER THE STREETS OF THIS pissant city for the umpteenth-millionth time; and though I know it to be pointless and worse, I do it. I do it I do it I do it out of habit, out of hatred for the patterns that have emerged to torment and enslave me: moist and meaningless shadow-things, liaisons with waste and nothingness in an endless cold cold night....

Let's face it, kiddo. The thrill is gone. The thrill of the chase, of poking my nose at scented tails and letting my tongue go wagga-wagga...it's gone. Too many nights going *yeah* and *really*, bumpy-bump *did you get off* and *I'll see ya later*. Too many nights senselessly pumping sperm into women who didn't want it to grow and probably didn't deserve its growth anyway, would treat it to more of human stupidity's boundless milk in the hopes of spawning a *lawyer* or some other luckless creepy-crawler. No, man. It's too goddamn easy to climb in bed with the wrong person and let the fluids fly, your promise to tomorrow just a yucky inconvenience that there's some puke to take care of.

No, man. Fuck it. *Beyond* the habit and the hate and the slavery, *beyond* the hitherto-sacred-cow-enshrined sex-play; *beyond* all that, there is something that is screaming to be *found*!

And. I will. Find. It.

Oh, what's this? A can. Hey doggies. I'll kick it. THWUNK clitta clitta clitta and nothing. Who am I kidding? This whole deal is a kick-the-can across infinity, and I'm infinitely weary. I'm going home.

No, I'm not. There's nothing there. Nothing I haven't sucked all the life from, anyway. Not even my art, clamoring (not as hard as I clamor) to be



FICTION BY
JOHN SKIPP

ILLUSTRATION BY
DAVID DIRCKS

JOSHUA PROCTOR'S SEARCH FOR
THE PERFECT MATE HAD TURNED
FROM A SCIENCE TO AN ART TO AN
OBSESSION. HE'D ALMOST GIVEN UP,
BUT NOW HIS QUEST
WAS ABOUT TO END.



WAITING

finished, waiting for me in the huge and empty darkness of my room. Not even my fabulous, breathtakingly beautiful art, which is displayed on all the right walls and between all the right covers, all over this great slobbering nation of ours and beyond! Oh yeah, it's waiting for me; but not like I'm waiting for you, honey. Not like I'm aching for you.

So where the hell are ya, anyway? I'm out on a main drag now, the cars are racing by with typical brainless fervor, this scene is obviously *happenin'*, man, *happenin'*, so... where the hell are ya? Huh? Please?

I don't know. There are so many people out here, doing their dingy public dances, stacking veneers like layers of paint on an old old structure. Well, hey, people! I got news for y'all! Sucker doesn't need a new paint-job; it needs to be torn the fuck DOWN, babies! It needs DEMOLISHED! It needs....

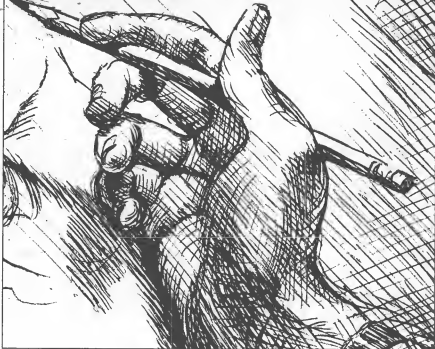
One may well wonder, I suppose, how this foaming maniac hopes to find any kind of woman at all in this state of mind... much less *the org.* (Oh, how that phrase rings in my ears. And what sweet promises it holds.) But it's not true. Already the woman-eyes are locking on me like rivets, doing the slow turn as I do the slow burn past them. They sense my hunger. They don't know what it is, mind you; wouldn't know how to sate it, even if they did. But they feel it.

How could they not? It is the bright red of lust and lifeblood, the penetrating yellow of keenest wisdom, the permeating green of calm and reconciliation, the soul-sucking blackness of utter despair and whitewhitelike light of utter clarity. It is a rainbow and more of energy, pouring out of me, eating and replenishing me so I can continue on my goddamn brainless quest. Quest of the Ultimate. Ultimate that I just gotta have.

I cringe inwardly now, thinking. Thinking: People, don't think that I think that I'm better than you. Don't think that I'm thinking, "I'm looking for someone much better than you'll ever be. Sorry, babe... nice tits, but no go." Because I'm as little and creeping and pathetic as any of you, out there blowing my brains out for something I'll never have. Just like you. And none of us will ever find it. Not a...

OOPS! What's this? "Oh, I'm sorry, hon. Bumped right into ya," I say without even thinking about it. I catch myself with a consoling hand on her shoulder, and wish that I would think once in a while before I do shit.

Because I recognize the light in her



PROCTOR'S FIRST LAW OF SEXUAL DYNAMICS: DON'T TOUCH UNLESS YOU REALLY MEAN IT. ONE LITTLE TOUCH IS ALL IT TAKES.

eyes; know that she won't be articulate enough to come up with anything witty and table-turning; know also that there's nothing in this world she'd rather do right now. She has felt the energy: it has touched her there, there, and (oh, yes!) *there*. I can see her thoughts, like two championship wrestlers having at it, one edging toward the ropes for a bit of tag teamwork. It's so sad, and so innocent, and I wish like crazy that it wasn't happening.

PROCTOR'S FIRST LAW OF SEXUAL DYNAMICS: Don't touch unless you really mean it. One little touch is all it takes. Once done, you either gotta follow through or do the Wormlike Wiggle. Both are more trouble than they're worth. Honest.

It's the Wormlike Wiggle for me, doll. The indicator lights in her-irises tell me that she's coming up with something. Just as her lips part to let me have it, I withdraw my hand and kick in the deflector shields, saying, "Uh... sorry again," with averted eyes and a doleful brush past her. Utterly uncharming. I'd think... but no.

"It's alright!" she assures me hurriedly, pitter-pattering up from behind. It's all I can do to keep from smacking my forehead with a flat palm, invoking the clownface gods. I don't stop walk-

ing. I cut a swath through the social intercourse of two happily chirruping couples, leaving them as a roadblock for Ms. Cutesiepie Hotpants. It slows her only a little.

"Hey!" she calls, sidestepping the parrots and doing (I just know) the silly little hands-up running bit. It is cruel and thoughtless to let her chase me halfway across town for nothing. Sighing ponderously, I decide to kick in...

PROCTOR'S COROLLARY TO HIS OWN FIRST LAW: The Wormlike Wiggle can sometimes be disguised as the Saber-toothed Snickass. This is to be done only in cases where corrective surgery is absolutely necessary.

"Hey," she says, laying her hand on my shoulder. I stop, and steel myself. I start to turn, and she's met me halfway.

Having faced me, she is again at a loss for words. I take a moment to appraise her. She's a nice girl, it's obvious. She's cute, she's ample, she's warm all over and eager to please. A couple of years ago, we coulda had some fun hey! I quite thoroughly hate myself for what I'm about to do.

"I..." she starts to say, shy smile creeping crossways, happy taffy-pullers at either end of her ripe red lips. I'm about to spazz them out when some fool bumps into me from behind, push-

ing me flush against her. It feels good. *Damn* you, God or whatever you are! for making us all so vulnerable.

The stunned silence lasts too long. She inflates it to triple its actual worth. My eyes burn like hot pus behind the eyelids, and I feel an unwanted tear gathering substance there. My hands come up to her shoulders and push me gently away. Maybe, just maybe, I can play this one straight.

"Darlin'," I say with just the right blend of tough 'n' tenderness, "you're a very sweet lady, and cute to boot, but I really gotta get going." Then I give her the patented winkansmile, and turn to walk away.

Winkansmile. Frankenstein. Here's the evil Dr. Winkansmile, building monsters from the pieces of dead and mouldering dreams! Where are the god-damn torch-bearing villagers to put me out of my misery? Do I have to come back for yet another dreary sequel?

Yup. I hooked her like a small fish; no matter how many times I throw her back, she just got to have that worm. "No, wait a minute!" she cries, stopping me. "Umm... couldn't we, like, get together lat—"

"See, I've got this little problem," I butt in quickly, working my best understated Bruce Dern imitation. "I've got to disassemble my piggy-banks. By my estimation, I'm up to roughly two hundred and fifty thousand pennies. That's a lot, don't you think?"

She nods, confused. We're almost halfway there.

"Well, tomorrow, I'm going up to the top of the Empire State Building during rush hour and flinging them all right over the side."

Her stare is blank. It's working. God help me.

"You've heard about how, if you toss a penny off the Empire State Building, it can go straight through a person? Faster than a speeding bullet? I giggle in an unheinged manner. Go git 'er, Sabertooth!

"Well, I figure, it's going to cost me, sure, but I'll probably go down as the single most fiscally extravagant mass-murderer in American history, not to mention the biggest." I allow myself to shift into full-tilt hysteria now. "Fuck Charles Whitman! Fuck Henry Lee Lucas! Nambie-pambee, penny-ante, piggy-wiggee diddee-shitty..."

I turn away then, making tracks, still sing-song ranting far beyond her audible range, my last impression of her face embossed against my inner eyes. I don't wait to see the taffy-pullers yank her face downward, don't wait to

see the hurt and confusion. Can't bear to see it. I walk off hurriedly, contemplating the underside of speeding cars as a final resting place....

Yeah, I can see it now. *THE JOSHUA PROCTOR STORY*: closing reel. Our hero finally realizes what a loathsome, heartless monster he has become. Like all those who flip God the bird by pursuing the unreasonable, like all those who aspire to Godhood themselves, his heart's been corrupted and his demons unleashed. The bitter irony of it, the sorrow and revulsion, brings the tears and laughter bubbling up in one last mad paradoxical burst.

The city blurs, goes soft and runny. Close-up of his face, hideously transforming: yellow slit-eyes above the long-toothed snout, spilling watery slime down his cheek's matted fur. He wipes his eyes with two monstrous claws, howling now, and tries to refocus.

A thousand lights pierce the soft gray smudge, homing in on him like spotlights from heaven. They are calling him home. A repentant human voice echoes inside his mind, saying *LORD JESUS, FORGIVE ME* (who wrote this script?). While the outer beast flails and bellows its rage. No more commercials now, kiddies; this is the dumb old climax you've been waiting for.

Full-body shot of the thing, rearing back as the multi-fold lights start to bathe and envelop it. Lashing out at nothing, now glowing from within, oblivious to the screams of the gathering crowd, it howls and is blind and in frenzy.

A stupid cop runs up and clubs it from behind. Whirl. Slash. So fast that the body stands, teetering slightly, while the face wetly exits stage left. This time, it hears the screams all around it. With one last shriek of anguish, the creature takes five stumbling steps backward. Into the street.

The first car has got to be doing forty when it hits the monster and sends it spiraling crazily, like a poorly tossed football, into the opposing lane. The wide receiver is a ten-ton semi. There is no time to brake. Or scream.

Ground-level close-up of all those wheels.

Omgod.

They're so terribly fast....

And the head of the thing that was Joshua Proctor explodes in a shower of luminous gore. No longer the painter of bleeding flowers, of crystals and beasts with knowing smiles, this thing that death-kicks upward, catches on the chassis, and drags like a broken muffer. No more, the embellisher of human core visions and painter of blushes on

warm feminine flesh, now painting the streets with garish smears of meat and radiance. The legs snap off just above the ankles. This journey is ended. As if to lend this emphasis, the truck suerves suddenly to squeeze viscera from either open end of the flopping carcass and mash it flat under rubber rollers.

No matter that he's left his indeleble mark on the world, pressed pavement-tight and ever-glowing. The quest is finished, and he has failed.

And, of course, she is there. We recognize her instantly, although we've never seen her before; standing alone in the crowd, with the bright tears coursing down her cheeks. Bright tears, mirroring the stupid brilliance of his remains, reflecting his soul as she turns, defeated now as well, and staggers half-dead into the empty city night....

Shit.

Okay, so I'll stay on this side of the street, dammit. I know how the fucking Fates like to deal with quitters. And I hate pathos, believe it or not. Damned if I'm gonna be that object of it in my own friggin' movie.

It's just that it's so hard, man. It really is so very very mercilessly hard to just keep going like this that I just can't believe it's happening sometimes....

But I've stood here long enough. There are enough people around here to choke a sperm whale, and I know you're out there somewhere. Ol' Josh hasn't wasted himself yet, darlin'. And he's been waiting all his life to meet you.

So don't make him wait too much longer, okay?

I don't know how much longer he can take it.

MMMMM, THIS IS GOOD MOCHA JAVA. I savor it between lungfuls of streamlined tobacco, eyeballing the girls at the very next table, and I think about compensations (of which there are many). The joint I wound up sharing with those high school kids detached me somewhat. Things look a little less bleak now. Hey! It's time to rethink again. Think about...

Compensations. Perhaps it would be a good idea to (long as I'm sittin' here) count the old blessings for a change! I pull out a fine-point marker and the trusty pocket sketchpad, and I briefly jot down the following:

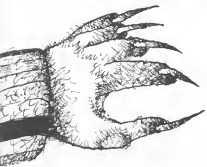
YOU OUGHTTA BE ASHAMED, BUNKY! LOOK WHAT YOU GOT!

Because I'm an artist (also because I'm stoned, and not a little crazy for starters), I take the time to put this in a word balloon and issue it from the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 84



THE MAN WHO WASN'T NICE TO PUMPKIN HEAD DOLLS



Halloween fiction by

DARRELL SCHWEITZER

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN BREAKEY

A small doll that doesn't talk, wet, or move. A doll every child loves and wants, and which Mr. Norton can't stand the sight of. But Mr. Norton's problem with Pumpkin Head Dolls is about to be solved, though not in the way he expects. . . .

Norton's life had been on the downhill slide for a long time, as he dropped by exquisitely excruciating degrees from corporate vice president to junior manager of Blue Elf Toyland store #23. This was it. He knew his end was near.

"The crowd's getting pretty ugly out there, Mister Norton," Cheryl, the young salesclerk, said.

He glanced up at the clock—it was one minute to opening time—and then looked with something approaching real fear across the sales floor to the locked glass doors. Not Halloween yet, but the Christmas sales had already begun. He braced himself against the counter at the far end of the store.

They were getting pretty ugly out there. As many as two hundred grim-faced women stood in a carefully formed line. They'd been jockeying for position for hours. Even from where he stood, he could hear occasional mutterings and snarls. But few in the crowd spoke. They just stared hungrily through the glass, directly at him.

"Open the doors, Cheryl," said Brandt, the senior manager, standing in the office doorway to Norton's far left, well out of the line of fire.

The salesclerk unlocked the doors and ran for her life down a side aisle.

"Have fun, Norton," the senior manager said. He went into his office and locked the door.

Incredibly, as if in some fiendishly subtle mockery, the crowd entered ►

PUMPKIN

quietly. All the horror stories Norton had heard from the employees of other stores rushed through his mind just then, but still the women marched toward him without a word, clutching their purses and shopping bags tightly in front of themselves. They crossed the whole length of the sales area without pausing to look at *anything*, and came to a simultaneous halt when the first one reached the counter.

The first one was fiftyish, overweight, puffy-faced with beady eyes, but she spoke with a sweet, almost timid voice.

"Excuse me, sir, but do you have any Pumpkin Head Dolls in today?"

Norton gulped and forced himself to say, "Yes, we do."

And then the carnage began, a mad struggle of shrieking, frenzied women grabbing, clawing at each other, all but climbing over the counter as he and Cheryl tried to hand out the boxed dolls one by one and take money amid shouts of "No fair!" and "I was here first!" and "She's got two! She's hoarding!" At one point there was someone climbing over, a skinny hag dressed all in black, on her hands and knees on the counter top. Norton had no idea of how she got there or why or where she went eventually. Dust rose. Somewhere an expensive electric train layout crashed

to the floor and was trampled underfoot. Scraps of paper hung in the air. A purse flew over the writhing mass of heads and limbs. There was no end to it. Time stopped for Norton. The noise reached the threshold of pain. Thousands upon thousands of faces came at him out of a red haze, screaming, "Give me one! Give me one!" while Cheryl distributed dolls as if the supply were magically, impossibly infinite. An image flashed into his mind: an absurd cornucopia out of which dolls came wriggling like an army of rats. Toward the end he was definitely hallucinating. He thought he saw, over the heads of the crowd and through the glass doors, a gigantic orange-mopped Pumpkin Head Doll perched atop the Empire State Building (in Philadelphia?) swatting Phantom jets. (In Philadelphia?)

There wasn't a lull until eleven-thirty. The store had opened at nine.

"Oh, my God," Norton said, collapsing onto a stool. He'd lost his tie somewhere.

Cheryl's hair was mussed. Her glasses were askew and the front of her blouse was torn. She leaned heavily on the counter and said, "It's just a craze. It'll be over soon. Be glad for that."

Norton bleakly regarded the cash register, now so stuffed with bills, checks, and even a few credit cards that

the drawer wouldn't close. Somehow a woman's stocking had become entangled in the sales-slip printer.

He knew he should be elated at such record sales, but he also knew, deep inside, that the national mania for Pumpkin Head Dolls revealed to him, with hideous and inescapable certainty, the throbbing, bestial horror that lurked in the depths of the human soul. It hadn't been worth it.

"At least we don't have any more of the goddamn things around," he said after a while.

"Actually, Mister Norton, we have one more. The box was torn. We couldn't sell it like that, could we?"

"Oh, my God..."

She reached under the counter and produced the doll in the torn box.

He laughed bitterly.

"That face... It looks like a god-damned microcephalic, doesn't it? You know, a pinhead, a brain-damage case, duh... Why would anyone ever want one?"

"I think the whole idea is that if it isn't perfectly beautiful, then people can identify with—"

"I WANT IT!" Suddenly the double doors flew open and a three-hundred-pound woman came charging in like a maddened elephant.

"No! It's mine!" Another one, short and wiry, jumped up from where she'd been crouching on the floor in front of the counter.

Before Norton or Cheryl could do anything, the box had disintegrated and the two women had hold of the doll, each trying to yank it away from the other.

"Ladies, ladies, please..."

Then he grabbed the doll too, and so did Cheryl, and for an instant all four were tugging, shaking, twisting, shouting, trying to reason, or cursing under the breath.

The sound of ripping cloth was impossibly loud.

Again, before anybody could do anything, the four of them were standing in a circle, staring at what they held in their hands. The fat lady had the head, the skinny one most of the torso and both legs. Norton and Cheryl each held an arm. Stuffing dribbled gently to the floor.

The fat lady began to sniffle. The thin one started keening like an air-raid siren.

"Oh, give me the stupid thing," Norton said, snatching the remains from the others. He went behind the counter and dumped them in a paper bag, then tore a sheet from a notepad and stapled it to the bag. He wrote on the sheet



with a broad-tipped pen:

YOUR PUMPKIN HEAD DOLL

HAS DIED.

HOW SAD.

BUT DON'T WORRY.

SHE WENT TO HEAVEN.

PLEASE GIVE HER A DECENT BURIAL.

THE MANAGEMENT

He handed the bag to the fat lady, who took it with limp fingers. Both women were clearly in a state of shock. They left without another word.

That was the thing about Pumpkin Head Dolls. The customer was supposed to "adopt" them. The manufacturer even sent Christmas and birthday cards to the dolls, as if they were real children. Norton wondered if they sent death certificates too.

"I can't stand it anymore," he said. "Tell Brandt I got sick and had to take the afternoon off." He picked up his coat and staggered out of the store.

NORTON'S WIFE SPOKE ONLY IN CLICHÉS. Never, in all their married life, had she uttered a sentence which hadn't occurred in the dialogue of a TV sitcom first. Once, he'd found it amusing. Now it was another of life's frustrations, and life's frustrations were beginning to pile up.

He spent the afternoon wandering aimlessly around the city, and didn't get home until the usual time.

"Had a hard day, Hon?" his wife said.

He could only mumble.

"Aw, poor baby..."

At dinner he was too tense to eat. He could only drink black coffee and stare at the tabletop.

"Our little darling got the cutest thing today," she said. "It was just adorable."

"Yes!" squealed their little darling daughter as she slid from her chair and ran out of the room. She came back in with a big smile on her face and the most hideous Pumpkin Head Doll in all creation in her arms. "Look, Daddy! Isn't she wonderful? Her name is Sally."

"Take it away! Don't let me see that thing around the house again!"

His wife gaped. His daughter started to babble. "But...but...I adopted her! She lives here now! It'll be okay, Daddy. She was an orphan and she needed a home, and I... Here, look."

She handed him a paper. It was a pseudo-official certificate stamped with a gold seal and signed illegibly by some machine, outlining the terms of the adoption. Obnoxiously cute Pumpkin Head

figures danced in the margins. In fine print at the bottom, among a row of unharvested pumpkins, was something called *The Legend of the Pumpkin Head Dolls*.

"Oh my God..."

He crumpled the paper.

"Daddy! No!"

"Stop it!" his wife screamed. (He'd heard a scream like that before. He couldn't remember which show.)

He got up, ran into the kitchen, stuffed the paper down the garbage disposal, and flipped the switch. The gurgling sound was somehow tremendously reassuring. He let the unit run for several minutes, just listening.

"You're evil, Daddy. You're a bad, bad man."

He turned around from the sink and saw his daughter standing in the doorway, clutching the doll tightly.

"Why don't you love Sally like Mommy and I do? Everybody loves Pumpkin Head Dolls except very bad people."

"I don't have to explain anything to you, little lady," he said. "Now march on out of here and take that thing with you. If I didn't think it would clog up the drain, I'd—"

"No!" the child shrieked as she ran from the room. He heard her bounding up the stairs. The door to her bedroom slammed. Then she seemed to be moving furniture to barricade herself in.

"Don't you think you were a little harsh?" his wife asked.

"I can't stand it any longer..."

HE SPENT THE EVENING WATCHING TELEVISION, just anything that was on. He couldn't pay attention. After a while he fell asleep on the sofa. He woke up in the dark with no idea of how late it must have been. The house was silent. The television was still on, the sound turned way down, the screen flickering gray-blue from an old movie.

He watched for a minute and discovered that the movie was *Wrestling Women vs. the Aztec Mummy*, only the mummy looked like a huge Pumpkin Head Doll.

"I must be going crazy," he said.

"That's it."

He staggered over to the set, turned it off, then retreated to the sofa and lay down again, staring up at the ceiling.

He didn't really believe he was crazy. No, it wasn't like that. He remembered another late-night movie, a much better one, the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. He was like Kevin McCarthy screaming on that highway at the end, the last person in the world who hadn't



"I WANT IT!!!"

Suddenly the double doors flew open and a three-hundred-pound woman came charging in like a maddened elephant.

PUMPKIN



Norton stood alone in the store-room, surrounded on all sides by six-foot stacks of boxes containing Pumpkin Head Dolls. This was to be his moment of revenge and triumph....

been taken over by the Pumpkin Head Dolls.

Once more he dozed off, and what happened next, he decided later, must have been a dream.

There was a buzzing sound from the TV set, like a swarm of bees. He looked up and saw that the screen was glowing a pale white. Something seemed to be moving inside the set.

He rolled over onto one side for a better look, then blinked and shook his head, sure he was seeing things.

But he wasn't. The screen really was bulging slowly outward.

Something was climbing out of the television set, separating itself from the bulging, almost gelatinous screen. He watched in helpless horror as the thing approached him—a Pumpkin Head Doll, its dull red eyes glowing like coals.

Another doll emerged, and another, and many more. They swarmed over the living room, climbing the curtains, seating themselves in rows along the windowsills and atop the curtain rods, murmuring. A swelling mass of them covered the floor, surrounding the sofa, all of them staring up at him with their vapid faces and glowing eyes.

One climbed onto the coffee table in front of him. He recognized it. It was his daughter's doll. It spoke to him in a voice that was all the more terrifying for its lack of emotional tone.

"We've been talking it over, Mister Norton. Your daughter is right. You are a bad man. Only bad people don't love Pumpkin Head Dolls. Do you know our legend? Long ago we all lived in a bright green valley where the sky was blue and the flowers were yellow and the brook went *gurgle, gurgle* all day, and the birds sang and we had nothing to do but play forever and ever. We were very happy there. But then a very bad person, a wicked witch, changed us all into pumpkins. She was jealous because we had been so happy. We couldn't play anymore. It was awful. But at last a good witch came along. She loved us, and made us into what we are now. But we couldn't find our way back to the happy valley. We didn't have any place to live. The good witch was too poor to take care of us all, so she put us up for adoption. That's why we're being adopted all over the world, because *everybody* loves us, except very, very bad people, Mister Norton."

He forced himself to speak calmly. "Whatever happened to the wicked witch?"

"You don't want to know, Mister Norton. Don't be like her. We've decided to give you another chance. It's not too

late for you to start being nice to us."

Then they crawled back into the TV set, and somehow he fell asleep for a third time. When he awoke again it was dawn. He went over and touched the TV screen, examining it closely. It was just an ordinary screen. He laughed to himself softly.

WHEN HE ARRIVED AT THE STORE FOR work that day, the senior manager met him at the door.

"Hello, Norton."

"Hello, Mr. Brandt."

"I trust you're feeling better today, Norton."

"Yes, I am. Thank you."

"That's good, Norton, because I want you to work late tonight."

"Late?"

"You heard me, Norton. There's a new shipment of Pumpkin Head Dolls coming in. I told them not to send the truck till after closing. I don't want a riot starting. It's happened at other stores, you know."

"I've read about it in the papers. Incredible, isn't it?"

"You think you can handle this, Norton?"

"Yes. Certainly, Mr. Brandt."

The day passed quietly. There were actually children in the store for once, including a little boy who stood for hours watching the electric trains go around on the display layout Cheryl had painstakingly reassembled. Business was modest. Some dolls sold, but only ordinary ones, the kind little girls play with for a few years and then get over.

He took Cheryl out to lunch at Horn & Hardart's. They had pumpkin pie for dessert. He whistled to himself on the way back. He was in a cheerful mood because he had a plan. The details unfolded beautifully in his mind like one of those Japanese paper flowers dropped in water.

He went through the rest of the day so energetically that around four the senior manager clapped his hand on his shoulder and said, "You know, Norton, when you first came here, I thought you were a washout. But I see that I was wrong. You're going to be all right."

"Thank you, Mr. Brandt."

When the store closed and Mr. Brandt and Cheryl went home, Norton spent about an hour tidying up. Then he sat in his cubbyhole of an office going over invoices and receipts.

The delivery truck didn't arrive until after dark. He directed the driver to the loading dock in back, and the two of them unloaded crate after crate of Pumpkin Head Dolls.

"Jeez," the driver said. "I don't see what gets people so all excited about these stupid things."

"That makes two of us," Norton said. He felt a sudden, warm fellowship toward the man.

After the driver had gone, Norton stood alone in the storeroom, surrounded on all sides by six-foot stacks of boxes containing Pumpkin Head Dolls. He experienced an almost disorienting sense of elation. This was to be his moment of revenge and triumph, when he would make up for all the failures and frustrations, all the grinding agonies of his life.

He got a large, very sharp pair of scissors out of a desk drawer and opened the first box.

The work took hours, as he cut off the head of each doll. He counted five hundred of them. He tied the heads to long pieces of twine and strung them up like Christmas decorations, all around the store. The bodies he left in a heap in the middle of the floor, next to the empty boxes. About midnight, when he was done, he stood in the exit doorway, surveying his work.

He realized that he had finally cracked. There was no doubting it. He was insane. He would certainly lose his job, and he would probably be sued. Psychiatric tests were inevitable, and he might even be committed.

But it was all worth it for this single moment.

Smiling, he turned out the light and went home.

HE SPOKE GENTLY TO HIS WIFE, APOLOGIZING for not telling her he'd had to work late. He sat up with her over coffee, listening patiently to her gossip, which he would have found unappealingly brainless under any other circumstances. They laughed and joked together as they hadn't done in years.

When he heard footsteps overhead, he realized that his daughter was still up. He went upstairs, shoed her into bed, and sat down to read her a bedtime story. She looked at him with sullen suspicion, but listened as he read *The Brave Little Toaster* to her. It was her favorite, and his too. He found the toaster's will to survive and ultimately prevail intensely inspiring.

When she was asleep, he searched around for the doll, but couldn't find it. She had probably hidden it, he concluded. He chuckled softly to himself and left the bedroom.

He slept well that night. There were no bad dreams. Nothing happened until morning.

At six o'clock the phone rang.

"Norton!" Mr. Brandt screamed. Norton had never heard a human voice convey such awful, limitless agony and despair. He imagined the cries of the damned were like that. "You...you...won't believe...the dolls!"

"I know all about it, Mr. Brandt."

"You? You?"

"Yes, Mr. Brandt. Me. Goodbye, Mr. Brandt."

He hung up, then started laughing, gently at first, then hysterically, uncontrollably. He hurled the telephone through the nearest window.

His wife woke up. "What on Earth's come over you?" she asked.

He told her.

"You've gone crazy!"

"Yes! Yes!" he shouted. "I have!" He clapped his hands and jumped up and down like a gleeful child.

The doorbell rang. His wife began to climb out of bed.

"Never mind," he said calmly. "I'll get it."

He made it downstairs just in time to see an envelope drop through the mail slot. He picked it up and saw that it was addressed to him, but there was no return address or postage on it.

He opened the envelope. The stationery was familiar. He recognized the drawings in the margins at once. The letter said:

THE PUMPKIN HEAD DOLLS
ARE SORRY TO ANNOUNCE
THE SUDDEN DEATH OF
MR. JOSEPH NORTON.
HOW SAD.

HE WAS A VERY, VERY BAD MAN.

HE HAD A CHANCE TO

BECOME A GOOD MAN,
BUT HE DECIDED TO STAY BAD.

NOW IT IS TOO LATE.

At the bottom of the page, it said in fine print:

This is what happened
to the wicked witch....

He flung open the door and looked around for whoever had delivered the message.

A very short figure was running along the other side of the street. He bounded out of the house in his pajamas, rustling through the leaves on the front lawn.

"Hey, you! Come back here!"

The running figure stopped, turned, and faced him.

He froze where he was, in the middle of the street. He didn't even see the truck that hit him.

AFTER THAT, EVERYONE IN THE WORLD was nice to Pumpkin Head Dolls. ■



"The bad news is we're lost. The good news is we're second in line for takeoff!"

PERFECT DISGUISES

Halloween fiction by **BRUCE TAYLOR**

There is a time in every child's
life when he realizes his world is
changing and that things, no
matter how hard he wishes, will
never be the same. But this is
Halloween, a night when nothing
is impossible and when wishes
carry a little more weight
than usual. . . .

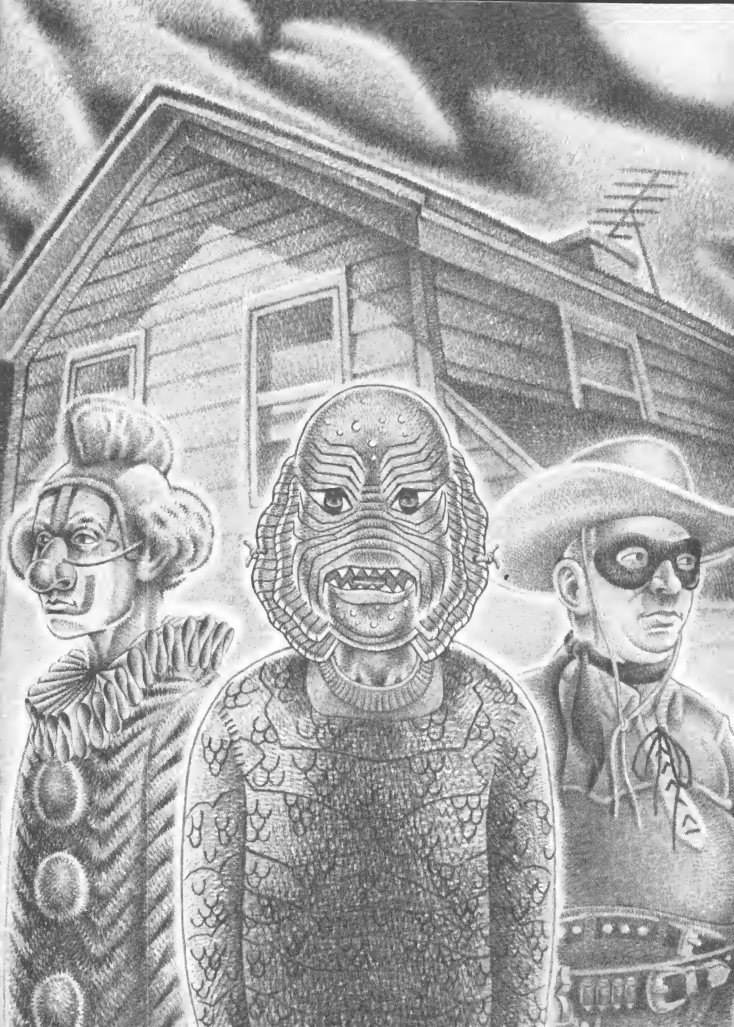
EDWARD LOVED HALLOWEEN. It was a time to let his imagination run wild. At age ten, he had a pretty good imagination. He could look into a mirror and instead of seeing a brown-haired, befeckled and green-eyed kid, he would see a ghost, a goblin, a Hollywood movie star—anything else but Edward, age ten.

But Halloween was best of all. Halloween. Ah, yes. Cowboys and spacemen and queens and clowns.

Edward had several friends he'd trick-or-treated with for the last couple of years. There was Roy, who either liked crew cuts all year around or who always got them, whether he liked them or not. He also had a tendency to wear plaid shirts and was kind of pudgy. Whenever Edward went over to his place to visit, inevitably Roy's dad—a rather pudgy man himself with a crew cut and fondness for plaid shirts—was either watching the news or downstairs putting together or taking apart a transmission or a carburetor or a master cylinder, or something like that. The only people in Roy's family who didn't have crew cuts were his mother and his sister Roxanne. Though Roxanne was also a bit overweight and liked to keep her hair short. Just like her mother.

Another of Edward's friends was Vincent. He was the same age as Edward and Roy, but he looked older. Vincent had always enjoyed Halloween too. In fact, Vincent sometimes looked like a symbol of Halloween—he was scruffy as a scarecrow, gaunt as death, and grim as the Reaper. ▶

ILLUSTRATION BY KELLY ALDER



DISGUISES

Oddly enough, Vincent usually dressed as a clown on Halloween. Roy went in for cowboy themes—his favorite TV character was *The Long Ranger*.

When Edward and Vincent visited Roy, they usually sat around the Philco with big mugs of hot cocoa and watched *The Lone Ranger*. When they went to Vincent's, they sat around with Cokes and watched Vincent's favorite cartoon character—Bugs Bunny. At Edward's house, they sat around with all sorts of snacks, but didn't eat any of them while the TV was on because they were usually too busy watching Edward's favorite shows, science fiction films and monster movies—the scarier the better. After the shows, they would eat. When you're having so much fun being scared out of your wits, who wants to be distracted munching Cheese-Its? Or Hi-Ho Crackers?

When Halloween came around each year, Edward always found plenty of ideas from the movies that he could use for costumes, from the Metaluna Mutant of *This Island Earth* to the Creature from the Black Lagoon. Name the creature and there was Edward, trying to figure out a costume for Halloween.

"So what are you going as this year?" whispered Roy one day in Social Studies class. He sat in back of Edward and had a habit of whispering things to Edward. And Edward was always chagrined because he had to lean back to hear Roy and sometimes Mr. Jackson caught Edward leaning and once wondered out loud if Edward was stretching. (Edward had once answered "Yes," to which Mr. Jackson suggested that maybe he should work on stretching his ears so he could hear better, so that he wouldn't look so ridiculous. At that moment Edward couldn't tell who he hated more, Mr. Jackson or Roy.)

But this day Mr. Jackson was absorbed at the blackboard explaining why Communism was dangerous to the American ideals, and so when Roy asked the question about Halloween, Edward wrote down on a slip of paper, "Haven't decided yet."

"Better decide," whispered Roy. "It's Friday night. You got three days."

Edward nodded. He wrote a note: "What are you going as?"

"Lone Ranger," whispered Roy.

Another note: "Go as his horse."

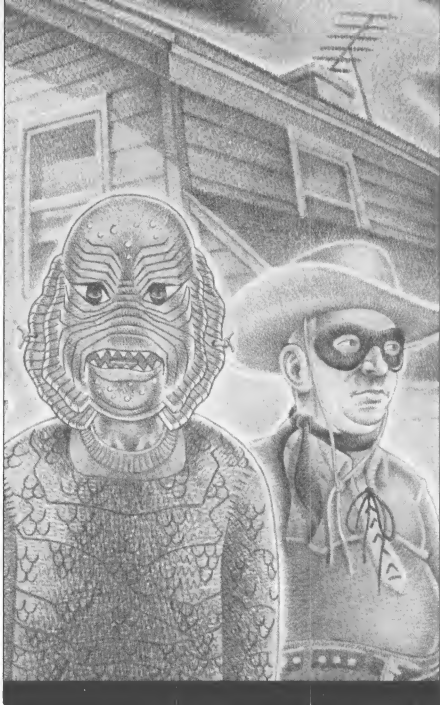
"Why?" whispered Roy.

"You won't need a costume," wrote Edward.

Pause. *Punch*. A fist in Edward's back. "OOOOO!" said Edward.

"What's going on?" said Mr. Jackson.

"Oh, farts!" whispered Roy.



Oh, yes, oh, yes, it was a perfect Halloween evening...with bags fat with candy, goblins and witches and ghosts moving down the street and a wind to move the trees....

THAT EVENING, AFTER STAYING LATE AND each writing one hundred times, "I will not talk out of turn," Roy and Edward walked home together in the early evening dusk. Roy kicked at yellow maple leaves as he walked. There was the smell of burning leaves and Edward said, "Something's eating you."

"Nah," he said, avoiding Edward's eyes.

"You sure?"

Shrug. Kick at leaves.

"Did I do something? You mad about having to stay after?"

"Nah."

Edward shrugged. "If you wanna tell me, I'll listen."

Long pause. "Did you get an invite to Jan Matthew's birthday party?"

Edward had to think for a minute. "Yeah. Didn't you?"

"Did Vincent get an invite?"

"Yeah," said Edward

Roy didn't say anything.

"I don't get it," Edward said. "She wouldn't invite Vincent and me and not invite you. Maybe your invitation got lost in the mail."

"Maybe," said Roy. He abruptly turned. "See you tomorrow."

"Hey!" said Edward. "Call her up—ask what happened—"

"Yeah," said Roy. "Catchya later."

He walked, head down, kicking at leaves.

Edward stood there, not knowing exactly what to do—knowing that both Vincent and Roy really liked Jan Matthew, but as far as Edward knew, she didn't really show much interest in anyone else except for Mark McCleary who, as near as Edward could tell, thought she did not exist.

When Vincent came over to see him that evening, Edward told him what Roy had said. He sat on Edward's bed and said, "Sure, I like Jan Matthew. So does everybody else. But if Roy didn't get an invite—I dunno. He should know she doesn't really care—but it sure is crappy, anyway," Vincent scratched his head.

"Well," said Edward, "if she doesn't invite Roy, I'm not going."

"But you don't particularly like her."

"Yeah."

"I do."

"Yeah. So you'll probably go?"

Vincent sighed and looked more gaunt, more grim, and more serious. "I don't know. It's really nutty that she'd invite you and me and not him. I *know* he likes her and I do, too. And I want to go real bad—" He shook his head. "I dunno." He sighed. "What time you want to get together to go trick or treating?"

"We can leave my place at seven-thirty," said Edward. "What are you going as?"

Vincent lay back on Edward's bed and put his hands behind his head. "I'll probably go as Clarabelle," he said. "Like always."

"Hey," said Edward. "Roy could go as Howdy Doody and I could go like Buffalo Bob!"

"Eh," said Vincent. "I dunno. I thought you always liked to go as some sort of monster."

"Wow," laughed Edward. "I could go as you!"

"Funny," said Vincent, smiling a little. "Funnee."

THEN IT WAS HALLOWEEN NIGHT. EDWARD dressed up as the Creature from the Black Lagoon—a Creature made of dyed burlap and a lot of imaginative sewing by Edward's mother who really *couldn't* understand *why* Edward would want to dress like *that* when there were so many other costumes and disguises that seemed equally good. Why didn't he choose a costume like Roy's, she wondered, a nice white cowboy outfit with a white hat and a black mask that required *much* less work?

Vincent showed up as Clarabelle.

And just as Clarabelle and the Lone Ranger probably wouldn't have much to say to each other, neither did Roy and Vincent, hiding behind the usual Halloween chatter, "What did you get?"—"Oh, Mr. McConnelly *always* gives out apples."—"Wow, popcorn balls!"

And they talked about who was dressed as what. And they saw Mr. and Mrs. McDowell carrying a pumpkin, walking with four-year-old Lisa (a witch) and five-year-old Stanley (a ghost) and standing behind them as Lisa would say, "Twick-er-Tweet!" and hold out her bag and grin at the cascade of chewing gum, Butterfingers, cookies, and so on.

Oh, yes, oh, yes, it was a perfect Halloween evening, what with the clouds moving across the moon and Clarabelle and the Lone Ranger and the Creature from the Black Lagoon walking together in moonlight, then shadow, walking down a street of houses with fire-toothed pumpkins, fat and wonderfully baleful, sitting on porches, grinning out windows. Oh, yes, oh, yes, with bags fat with candy, goblins and witches and ghosts and spirits moving down and about the street and crossing it, and there was even a wind to move the trees and make the candlelight flutter and wave in pumpkin faces. And in this spooky pageantry, Clarabelle, the

Lone Ranger, and the Creature moved and talked of everything except what really mattered. But when you're having fun, who talks of what matters?

And they were all trying very hard to have fun and yet Edward knew something was missing. Something had changed. Forever. Somehow things were not as fun as they should have been. Something was wrong. Something was gone.

And then it was time for Jan Matthew's party, and Vincent went. Alone.

AFTER THAT, ROY AND EDWARD DIDN'T see too much of Vincent. The party was never brought up, the mystery never solved. But that night, Edward made a wish—and dreamed.

It was Halloween night and he, Vincent, and Roy were walking together down the street. But this time they weren't in costume—they just looked like they usually did—Roy with his crew cut and plaid shirt, Vincent gaunt as the Grim Reaper. They had their trick-or-treat bags with them and every house they went to they were greeted with exclamations of delight: The Johnsons said, "What wonderful costumes! Oh, how frightening! Oh, we're terribly frightened of you!" And each of them got a Milky Way candy bar.

The Elliots clapped their hands to see how Vincent and Edward and Roy were dressed. "Wonderful," they said, "excellent costumes!" They each got an apple and their choice of fresh taffy or Life-Savers.

Jack and Susan Thompson laughed. "Well, look at the adults! What perfect disguises! Here's a Coke for you, a Seven-Up for you, and a Nesbites for you."

With bags finally filled, the three friends stopped. They looked at each other. The wish was the same: So much to say, how do you begin? Something is changed—how do you change it back? Where do you begin? They stood there on that Halloween night, looking at each other—and did the only thing they could do.

Vincent tugged at a zipper in his scalp—and it continued to zip right down his face, neck, chest, crotch, and out stepped Clarabelle from the Vincent suit.

Roy did the same—and from the Roy suit, out stepped the Lone Ranger.

Edward did the same—and from the Edward suit, out stepped the Creature from the Black Lagoon. And, picking up their bags and costumes, Clarabelle, the Lone Ranger, and the Creature from the Black Lagoon stepped together from the moonlight—into the shadows. ■



THE

INTRODUCTION

IN THE MAJOR ARCANA OF THE TAROT deck, there is a forgotten twenty-third card—The Falling Man. It depicts a figure poised in endless descent, and represents an individual caught in forces beyond his understanding or control. . . .

Peter Deutch, a brilliant Hollywood filmmaker on the verge of burnout, has suddenly, miraculously, found happiness—and love. His friend Damon Fletcher has finally secured financing for their dream project, *Objet d'Art*, allowing him to walk away from Sinner, a lurid TV movie he has been directing. And he has fallen in love with an extraordinary woman named Alea. Beautiful, passionate, witty, and tender, Alea breaks through his armor of cynicism, and cherishes the humanity he thought he'd lost.

But Peter Deutch's fragile happiness is suddenly shattered when he discovers Alea coupling with a half-human demon whose eyes gleam like burnished coins. Unable to deal with what he sees, he flees. When he returns only minutes later, she has vanished without a trace.

Soon all that Peter has come to trust begins to dissolve beneath him. For every turn of his destiny has been guided by one Monsieur Rogoff, a diminutive man in quaint attire who rearranges reality with effortless ease, and has manipulated Peter's life toward his own bizarre ends. . . .

FALLING MAN

P A R T T W O

NOVELLA BY

D A V I D
J.
S C H O W

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID CELSI

One more thing, I love you, too. Peter paid pathological attention to packing. It was an autonomic thing, this ability to pack for a trip in a great rush and not forget a toothbrush or a checkbook or a needed file folder. A skill his shell retained when the rest of the relevancies of his life had dropped away. Stuffing balled socks into a sling bag, he let this skill run full auto, trusting that nothing critical was overlooked. He sensed, if only subdermally, that once he closed the door of this place and boarded the jet for Canada that he would never return to his home.

"Home" had lost all meaning for Peter in the past few hours he had spent preparing to abandon it. Until Alea, home was never what he'd called these rooms where he bathed and slept and never quite found the time to put in the oak shelves, or order the deskwork, or hang pictures, or invite peers for diversion. It was an enclosure that kept at bay certain inconvenient elements—heat, smog, rain—and imposed a sameness that was simplicity to ignore. It was a numbered door in a corridor of like doors, mazed into a floorplan that mirrored itself above and below and beyond. The building was a vast filing cabinet for people, an upscale address stocked with all the amenities. It was a mail slot individuated by initials and a phone number with a taped message.

Never a home, not truly.

It was the place where he had made love to Alea. That made it a home. They had never had sex anywhere else but on his carpeting, his mattresses, his iron-gray pillowback sofa group. Few areas in the apartment had not had their virginity violated, but it struck him that they'd never gotten naked at Alea's place, or a hotel, or anywhere but here. Home was the place where he and Alea had made love.

But this was also the place where Alea had fucked and been fucked... where she had enjoyed spreading her legs for something that did not look totally human. Where she'd told Peter to get out.

Betrayal seemed to seep from the wallwork. This was no longer Peter's place.

Slow rage steamed in his gut, subsided, marshaled again, until his mouth tasted foul. The wraparound picture windows showed him the Hollywood lightscape. Damon Fletcher had told Peter about Hollywood in all its bilious glory; here was a place where nothing was guaranteed to be lasting or sincere or real. No causes, no motives, no blame to be placed—this was Hollywood. It was where they worked because they could hack it and millions could not. Schwab's was boarded up and the Brown Derby shut down. Grauman's Chinese had been Mann's for a decade and the famous Tiny Naylor's drive-in coffee shop was history.

Hollywood.

Peter was supposed to be progressive, tolerant. Simple sexual infidelity had nothing to do with his anger. *And the Pacific Ocean was not really wet.*

Jealousy was a dragon with emerald eyes, one he had to engage in battle to deny what he felt. All the tender and private moments, and telling interludes between two human beings in sync, ▶

THE FALLING MAN

had been cleared away by a fierce possessiveness as frank as a jamming signal. The soft confidences he had shared with her were now drowned beneath thick, oily waves of selfishness and anxiety with a suddenness that sent the bowels plummeting and struck the brain comatose. He had heard her make those sweet sounds he thought reserved only for him, heard her laugh in a crushingly familiar way.

Sir, you got took, sir, and fell hard, sir, and offered the knife your shieldless back, stupid, and...

Truth buffeted through the windows of his mind and knocked asunder

cycled anger out and exhaustion in, let him trade seething rage for false despair. He cried. Time elapsed. He did not drink.

He stared toward, but paid no attention to, Nicholas Roeg's *Bad Timing* unspooling in the predawn on cable. Art Garfunkel, who had sung of sounds of silence, was fucking a dead woman because he was obsessed with her. The TV became an insect tonal noise, snowing Peter's inputs and insulating him from the sounds of the city. He fell asleep in the wing chair, packed but not departed. Dreaming permitted him to hear Alea's voice almost at will.

embraced were oxidizing now. Alea had been a wish-fulfillment practically from the beginning. To get her back, what could he do, what might he give up? Damon's voice welled up inside him, laid behind a sardonic echo track: *You actually sound happy.*

"HAPPY," PETER MUMBLED, AND WOKE UP. A key was ratcheting in the front door lock. All Peter's sensory knobs cranked to full tap. His vision targeted the door and his heartbeat hit runaway.

Light sheared in from the corridor and a small, hunched shape darted inside, hurriedly slamming the door. Peter heard furtive breathing in the renewed darkness, followed by a muffled slapping, as though the intruder was hastily brushing himself off. Then came the shuffle of short, waddling steps across the carpet, then a voice.

"Merde! Flaneur, indeed! Pahl! Is not even a loafer entitled to a small, eh, restorative—urp!—nip now and again?" The voice was brackish, and seemed to emanate from somewhere near the floor, as though the speaker were muttering from the bottom of a well.

Peter bolted out of the chair, still woozy, trying for a good Clint Eastwood tone and missing: "Who the fuck are you!"

"Ma foi!" The dwarf's volume matched Peter's. He jumped, clutched at his chest, got tangled in his own feet and tumbled into the two-tiered section of sunken living room. Peter, unmoving and not quite buying all this, watched the dwarf scramble back toward the front door. His chest convulsed. A wild laugh, unbidden and certainly inappropriate, tried to fight its way out and he killed it, swallowing air, numbed by the antics of this half-sized home invader. It was like blundering into the third reel of a silent movie comedy; he had no idea of what was going on, but it sure looked funny.

"Hey," His voice came out conversational, comic. He sprang for the door and easily intercepted the tiny interloper, spinning him about and shoving him back. He blocked the door with what he hoped was an aggressive stance. "What do you think you're doing here?" It was hopeless and trite. He would have cut it from a script.

The dwarf smiled with forced ease. The dirt on his face cracked. "Heh, heh... I clearly have stumbled, ah, literally, into the wrong apartment, Monsieur...I, em, I...am down the hall..." The gnomish face was interrupted by a cheesy grin. His eyes were rheumy and

It hurt to think of Alea, but he was unwilling to forget any facet of her. She had melted into the palpable Los Angeles darkness as easily as a wraith. Peter would not have thought it so simple to erase a person who had so much sheer presence.

the card house he had been tilting together. Alea's feelings had been not only reciprocal, but had radiated from her and come home to him two hundred percent. She had never been seduced. Despite the fact that Peter was wounded and hurt, he could not honestly round-file the one truth that defied the prime rule of Tinseltown: She had not used him for anything.

The bedroom scene played countless encores in his head. He was well into triple-digit reruns—the flash of Alea's cinnamon skin, the flush of intra-organism heat; shock-cuts of moisture and motion and love-grunts and the too-perfect monster filling her over and over...and two inhuman eyes full of molten copper. The memories stung and flew away and zipped home to sting again, like subliminals tucked away between the frames of film. Unfair. Subliminals were supposed to be outlawed.

At first he'd been destructive, throwing things like a petulant child, punching the refrigerator so the contents rattled and broke. He hit hard and opened up his hand. The blood calmed him,

Peter. Get out of here.

It was the same dark, soft voice that had once ordered him to leave his sperm nowhere but inside her. Doors opened by playful sensuality slammed with amplified violence because Alea's words held the unique venom of being unforgettable. They seemed designed to brand themselves into his memory. Peter had been neutered; his manhood wiped out by a single soft sentence in the dark. How could anyone fight artillery like that? How in hell to scour away the shame of turning and running? Nothing could win him back that lost dignity.

It hurt to think of Alea, but he was unwilling to forget any facet of her. He would not blank her out even if it meant his own survival. She had melted into the palpable Los Angeles darkness as easily as a wraith. Peter would not have thought it so simple to merely erase a person who had so much sheer presence that he thought of her anew every thirty seconds or so. Too many unfinished conversations hung between them, too many moments yet undecanted.

The bright chrome feelings he had

flummulated, and the special aroma of bargain port wafted up from his soiled and threadbare coat. Disturbed fleas settled.

"You are not down the hall," Peter said. "You will be out the window very shortly if I don't get a straight answer from you, you sawed-off little pisswah." Yeah, that was manly, he thought. It was taking all he had left at full power to toss a scare into a dwarf.

"Well, er, Monsieur, I..." The voice trailed off. The grin remained. The dwarf shrugged.

"Let's have a drink, you and I," Peter said. Changing tack was a good way to keep the upper hand. "Sounds like you could make good use of a spot or two. Shall we?" He waved the dwarf toward the kitchen, but the tiny man did not budge, unsure, nervous. "Come on, come on. A drink is what you want, right?"

The dwarf looked around to make sure Peter was addressing him. As he approached, Peter thought of Poe's character groping around the rim of the Pit. Once the dwarf was settled onto a stool at the breakfast bar, Peter pulled down the Chivas.

"Ah, good!" said the dwarf. "I was going to request something more potent than wine."

"Ice?"

"Do I look like a barbarian?"

"No offense," Peter handed across a thick-bottomed highball glass. The dwarf gulped the full whack and handed it back for more, smacking his lips.

"Sounds like you're in trouble for goldbricking, mate," Peter said as he poured.

"Eh?" His eyes never left the glass.

"You called yourself a *flaneur*, a goof-off. You always so charitable to yourself?"

"Of course not!" He banged the glass on the countertop for emphasis. "It was him. My employer. He watches. He checks. God help you if you fuck up." More scotch was within range and his truncated reach was sufficient to win it. When he made the grab he eased his hold on the bundle of keys he'd kept fisted tight and they hit the polished bar-top with the jangle of small change.

Peter recognized Alea's keys as much by their unique sound as by the snapshot glimpse of them he caught before his guest executed a noisy recovery and swept them into a dark, dirty pocket.

The keys were grouped, Peter knew, by a circlet of ball-and-socket gold chain, not plated, but apparently solid gold. Where a conventional person would have attached an oval Gucci plate with embossed initials, or one of

those stamped metal ticket facsimiles for *Cats* or *Les Misérables*, there was a tarnished brass knickknack the size of Peter's thumbnail. It was rectangular, with a raised border like a miniature playing card, and enclosed a deep-cut contour of a human figure, arms extended—the same outline that had previously appeared in bas-relief on Alea's waxen seal. The figure no longer looked to Peter like it was flying. It looked like it was plummeting toward some uncertain and ugly end, helpless to arrest its fall.

The dwarf downed two more burly swallows of scotch and muttered on about his philistine boss. Peter canceled the lunatic urge to laugh in favor of strategic timing.

He watched the dwarf's glass ascend, then caught him with a mouthful of liquor. "You made some kind of mistake?" he said. "Involving Alea."

"Oh, no, she was perfect. But I'm not supposed—" His gaze bounced up to Peter's triumphant face as the firebolt of Chivas burned its way down the wrong tube. It was a perfect double-take! He spluttered and turned an alarming shade of scarlet, veins bulging at the temples as he spluttered and gagged. "Zut! You!"

"You thought I was just a fellow burglar, right?"

The dwarf mopped at himself.

"See, pal, I'm an absolute security nut. Only Alea had the key combination that would open the front door. I changed the upper deadbolt myself; not even the building manager has a key to that one. But you did."

Swallowed air resolved into a broad panic far. "I—I only saw your—back before."

"Tell me about your employer." In a taut suspense script, the next line would be: *His name, for starters.* Peter leaned across the counter and pointed. "His name, for starters. Window's right over there."

"Monsieur Rogoff." The dwarf's tone was exasperated.

Peter thought that alcohol and self-interest were melding to get admirable results so far. "And does this Mister Rogoff know where Alea is?"

The dwarf shrugged again, sighed. "Ah, Monsieur. She is gone for always. Of her you will never see again." Said with the species of bogus regret the French believe is terribly sympathetic. "She was very beautiful..."

"Does Monsieur Rogoff know where she is?" Peter's face crimsoned, his eyes growing starkly white.

Maurice recoiled. "Monsieur Rogoff

knows—everything!" He hiccuped and silence lagged between the two men.

Peter poured himself a belt—over ice—and tipped it back.

"You will take me to meet Mister Rogoff tonight."

"Oh, no, Monsieur, I cannot! He would terminate me! Not for any price!"

"I didn't name a price." The dwarf's protest sounded a bit too rehearsed, so Peter kept on his deadly smile and lunatic-calm demeanor. "I'm offering you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—a chance to get back to the ground floor via the elevator instead of the fast way. Cheers."

Maurice lent the window a uneasy glance. "It is useless for me to argue, I suppose."

"Bingo," Peter toasted. "Or *splatoogy*."

Maurice winced at the indelicacy. He regarded his empty glass as a gallow-bound convict might his final taste on this world, with regret that he had not made it last longer. "Zut. So be it, then."

"I'll need my keys back to seal our little pact," Peter held out his hand.

The dwarf's phoney expression of camaraderie under fire dissolved into an acid look of daggers and poison. He rifled within his several coats, kicking up dust and gnats, every contortion punctuated by a grumbled checklist of curses in French, just in case Peter did not sense what an inconvenience he was causing.

But he relinquished the prize.

Peter's grasp closed on the keys, affirming their reality, his heart surging almost as if he had physically recaptured Alea herself. On its tiny ingot of gold, the man-like figure fell, and fell....

Kind of like the pose Maurice would strike on the way down, as he picked up speed. If.

"Don't fret, Shorty," Peter felt gruffly hale now. "I'll put in a word with your boss, after he and I take a meeting." He hesitated just shy of the sunken portion of the living room. "Unless, of course, you really do know where Alea is right now." He raised his eyebrows and considered the window again. "Hm?"

"That is something I wish with all my heart, *mon ami*," Maurice said in his saw-toothed voice. He spread his open palms in a theatrical gesture of impotence. "But, truly, I cannot say because I do not know. If Monsieur Rogoff wishes to divulge more to you, he shall."

Maurice's exaggerated courtliness was as grotesque as his expressions of sympathy were patently false. Peter found himself wishing for a pistol, some-

THE FALLING MAN

thing big and phallic and lethal, loaded with lead wadcutters. A mushrooming slug to the head; instant checkout. He was still thinking of death, and that was inappropriate, and he glimpsed in a flash just how absurd he was.

Play tough, he thought. *Let's see if you can maintain a degree of physical intimidation for this little errand, at least. Can you keep it up?*

"I think I might just be able to charm Monsieur Rogoff," he said. "Just look what I've done for our relationship in such a short time. Now move!" It was essential tough-guy dialogue.

Maurice belched, picked snot, moved as ordered.

THE GRANDFATHER CLOCK STUBBORNLY bonged four times. It was two-fifteen in the morning.

"Useless!" the little man snorted from his vantage at one of three high, narrow windows that took up most of the north wall of his cramped quarters. He was far up enough from street level that security bars would have been paranoid in the extreme. His exasperated comment formed a corona of mist on the chilly glass; from across his customary anarchic disarray, the cantankerous clock endured another of his mordant glances. "Old World craftsmanship... don't make 'em like they used to... *pah!*"

He fantasized sweet-talking the senile timepiece closer to one of the vaulted windows, then defenestrating it. It was fully twice the little man's height and might offer a heroic struggle, if it could anticipate anything other than a splendid view of nighttime Los Angeles all the way to the Hollywood sign. He could watch it somersault end-over-end as it achieved terminal velocity, the building's floors blurring past ever faster, and then the sweet harsh kiss of impact, the sundering of oiled mahogany, the splintering of joists, the glittering spray of cogs and gears and an end to years of temporal suffering.

He remained at the window, imagining himself a thane in a high keep, and watched as car headlights curbed on Highland Avenue and extinguished. The railroad watch in his box pocket declared the arrival of two-fifteen a.m. Maurice, as expected, was spot on.

The Victorian clutter of the workroom resembled the overstock of an antique shoppe and a thrift store, ignominiously mingled by one of California's over-hyped quakes. There was no obvious regard lent to cataloging, and none for display—the little man knew how to locate whatever he might require. He

gently shifted a dust-laden afghan, so as not to precipitate a barrage of sneezing. He thought: *I am healthy but I am old, and would spare my pipes the violence.* Beneath the afghan was a maplewood chest, rough-hewn like a rural coffin. It might adequately accommodate Maurice, should the dwarf ever decide to deace. From the chest the little man lifted out a cloudy bottle of very old, venerable brandy. Maurice's well-earned reward, for Peter Deutsch was a prize of rare worth. The little man resisted the temptation to puff the dust from the bottle, remembering to spare his pipes.

"Our Mister Deutsch has no idea of just how valuable he is," the little man said to the bottle. "Eh?" He hummed and laughed, in the manner of a child at play alone. "Right about now, our dear Peter is waxing tragic, pillorying himself in the most classical terms imaginable! Ah, 'Whom the gods would destroy, they would first make mad,' he is doubtless telling himself."

He settled back in his creaking office chair and steeped his fingers expectantly. "Hm. Some people just don't appreciate good *melodrama*."

PETER DEUTSCH VACILLATED BETWEEN waning anger and bewilderment, both dwindling to irrelevance in the face of his ever-amplifying exhaustion. He lifted and dropped each foot, climbing stairs again, thinking that the only reason people like great altitude is that it provides such a wonderful view when you fall.

Hysterical laughter seemed the most viable of all his options.

The dwarf, Maurice, no last name offered, had directed him over the hill of Hollywood proper, then to the ancient Bekins warehouse that loomed against the southern skyline as a decaying smog-tarnished colossus, way the hell down Highland Avenue. It looked like a decrepit Deco-era dirigible hangar.

Then came the chain-link barricades, the locks and fences, Maurice, like a rat, seemed able to squeeze through any opening the size of his head. Peter was forced to scramble over. The rusty coil of razor security wire sharply depreciated the value of his tailored shirt. A deviously crooked nailhead did likewise for his trousers, once Maurice had lifted open a rotten plank hatch much like an old root-cellar door. Down in the darkness, Peter deftly sank ankle-deep into a cold engulfment that wasted both his shoes. Then Maurice led the way up flight after flight of groaning metal stairs barely a

yard in width and sandwiched between mildew and verdigris-encrusted walls, like some forgotten fire escape. Peter's hand came away orange whenever he gripped the rail, which came and went like a cruel practical joke. He yawned. He was sweating. His socks were soaked through with something vile. *Keep climbing.*

He was crazy, all right, to be following a dwarf who had burgled into his life with maddeningly vague tidbits about the fate of the creature he'd once thought of as a human being named Alea. Alea, who right now symbolized his entire capacity for love, sealed up in a bottle and thrown overboard. He felt as if his entire life had blown a tire.

He thought of freeway wrecks, of the shucked husks of destroyed tire treads, of disintegrated safety glass, of tardy paramedics and lives permanently off-course thanks to an errant second of high-speed traffic. Some people who worked in Hollywood commuted from San Diego. Three hours plus, coming and going, nearly a fifth of each waking day consumed by travel and drive-time radio and maybe, just maybe, a collision that could unmake your existence. It could all change in an instant. *Crash.*

Peter kept climbing.

He began to hear the wind cooing through the structure; thought he could feel the mammoth building swaying. It was an illusion, of course. His body told him that he was nearing the very top. In Maurice's wake he completed the final flight of risers, then wrestled past an acre or so of junk in an attic the size of half a football field—the discarded and obsolete detritus of hundreds of past lives. Then came a narrow stretch of planks laid across fat girders, sloping slightly downward, then more junk, now enclosed by close walls reaching not quite to the dim recesses of the ceiling.

Then, incongruously, came an office door with a tarnished brass knob. The pebbled glass was cataracted to ivory at the borders and held despite a heroic, curving fracture through the lower left quadrant. Flaking gilt proclaimed the MORRIS BUTTS DETECTIVE AGENCY. Detective Butts had gone wherever failed private eyes go, decades previously. The door was still in the world, and its glass was lit from within.

Maurice beckoned. "Enter." The door creaked. Peter thought: *This is not real life. This is an episode of Thriller and I'm about to meet Boris Karloff.*

'Is it Deutsch as is Sprechen sie

Deutsche?"

Peter nodded. A small man behind the desk was squinting at a crumbling Rolodex card.

"Maurice, show Mister Deutsch to a seat. The barstool will do."

Peter's eyes tried to deny the input—the little man's vest, the faded dignity of old silk, the swallowtail coat in gray pinstripe, the musky ascot and vintage pearl stickpin. He noticed a watch fob, and, in a fall of light beneath the desk... spats? The costume was natty, but had suffered rigors of wear. It made Peter think of that odd mixture of serenity and majesty which characterized elders whose minds could lock with crystal-fine resolution into the minutiae of the Depression, yet got only fringe reception on the here-and-now. He watched the little man pay meticulous attention to the flicking of dust—real and imagined—from his outfit.

Again, the laughter tried to punch up out of him. He contained it, grinding enamel.

"My young friend," the little man began while Maurice was still peering about for the location of the barstool. "Permit an introduction. The name is Rogoff."

"Monsieur Rogoff," Peter said vacantly.

A courtly nod, modest. "Thank you. Is something amiss, Mr. Deutsch? You're staring at me as if I had a third eye. Oh, Maurice, it's over by the clock, for heaven's sake!"

Maurice grumbled and heaved. Butlery was beneath his station.

"You look like one of those Hollywood Boulevard loons," said Peter. "The ones in the castoffs and theatre costumes you see picking in the litter baskets at three in the morning."

"And just now, you, Mr. Deutsch, look like a news composite of a crazed killer." He waved Peter's notice toward a foggy bureau mirror leaning atop a dresser missing all of its carved knobs. "Or perhaps more relevantly, a hammer murderer, eh?"

Maurice gave up trying to hoist the barstool and instead cleared it off and scrambled aboard. Let the new guy get his own goddamned seat.

Peter saw, staring back at him, an overused face, barely organized around manic eyes, darkened, hollowed. His hair was lank and dirty and sticking forth in windblown locks. The corners of his mouth were pulled back in a smile he could not feel. His face was numb; but here was that face, grinning. Several days of stubble coarsened the view. He could have been a denizen of the alleys



himself.

"So let's forgo snap judgment by appearance, hm? Let's go for the meat, the substance, the inner man, the details—and not the 'high concept,' as you might say. If I may presume." He seemed enormously pleased with his own banter, his face aglow, ruddy and elfin.

Peter abstracted past his own image in the mirror and took in the little man's bulb nose, the eyes like glittering chips of black quartzite. In defiance of cliché they, in fact, twinkled. His facial topography seemed to indicate the little man spent a great deal of time smiling. His hair was white as duck down, healthy but clipped very short, like that of an old Navy man. Peter rose, considered all the junk again, and sank his hands into his pockets. "I'll stand." He thought of poker.

"There is a question that brought you here," the little man began. It had the quality of a rehearsed speech; dialogue, a script—perhaps that was why the tone seemed weirdly jolly to Peter. "It caused you to follow Maurice into

this strange place. Why bother? You're a fellow who knows how to cut his losses. Why indeed? I've devoted a goodly amount of meditation to my response to the question—"

Peter fixated as though seeing Rogoff for the first time ever. "Where is she?" His voice was a whisper.

"Ah, precisely! The question!" A look of vindication fled across the leprechaun countenance. His hands fiddled with air. He was excited. "I shan't tell you she does not exist, as Maurice might have awhile ago. That sort of answer was designed more for... um, titillation, don't you think? Wouldn't serve my purpose, now that you're here. And I surmise that your patience is probably as worn down as your demeanor. I notice everything, you'll notice..."

M. Rogoff's voice was drubbing and hypnotic; Peter had to remind himself to ask again: "Where is she now?"

"Ah. I put it to you, sir: Would you like to see her again, now, tonight?" M. Rogoff tossed Peter's card onto the desktop, and reclined to relish the effect. Good scenes were Peter's business. Here was a man who could appreciate pains taken. "Academic, really. Of course you do."

Peter fought the surging anger inside himself. He wanted to face this *monsieur* evenly matched, emotionless. It almost worked.

"Of course I do." The rage, swirling crimson and cobalt, seethed just shy of boiling, and Peter's voice was low in the oppressive room.

"And the car you have brought with you, I presume it is a two-seater?"

"Oh, Monsieur!" exclaimed Maurice. "Such an automobile! Flashing green lights, little bells that ding when you leave your door ajar. Fairie voices that tell you to fasten your lap belt. Like something from that space movie!" Maurice had liked *Star Wars* a great deal.

"Don't hasten to invite yourself," M. Rogoff told the dwarf. "Mr. Deutsch and I have several private business matters to discuss. In the meantime, Maurice, as a reward for your sterling service, you'll find a bottle of extremely old brandy on the bookshelf right behind you, next to the clock. Also an envelope."

M. Rogoff rose from the desk, his height not changing all that noticeably. He flexed his hands into a pair of white linen evening gloves and fetched down the brushed top hat from his wicker roost. He directed Peter to pick up a large Gladstone bag in brown leather.

Peter's toes were almost touching the bag. He had rehearsed a lot of an-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 89

THE
T W I L I G H TSPECIAL REPORT BY
J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI

AS I REPORTED LAST ISSUE, THE NEW SYNDICATED VERSION of *The Twilight Zone* has begun filming in Toronto, and new episodes will air the week of October sixth in national syndication. In this and future articles, I'll be reporting on how the new *Zone* came to be, in spite of several formidable obstacles. But first, a brief update.

Production on the show began on Monday, April twenty-fifth, at the studios of Atlantis Films, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Filming commenced under the watchful eyes of executive producers Mark Shelmerdine and Michael MacMillan, and producer Seaton McLean. As it turned out, neither I nor any of the series' writers were present, as a result of the strike by the Writers Guild of America.

Since the previous column, new casting announcements have been made. Timothy Bottoms has agreed to play the lead role in "The Hellgrammite Method," a frightening tale about a rather unorthodox cure for alcoholism written by William Selby, to be directed by Gil Shilton. Next in order of production is "Memories," a very different riff on past-life regression starring Barbara Stock (best known for her regular role on *Spenser for Hire*), written by Bob Underwood, to be directed by Richard Bugajski. Following that is "The Call," a story of loneliness and death and a wrong number that causes them to intersect, starring William Sanderson ("Larry" of *Newhart* fame), written by myself, and directed by Gil Shilton.

As I write this, six episodes have been filmed, with the seventh, "Hellgrammite," shooting at this moment. ▶

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**The latest version of
The Twilight Zone
heads for its fall
television debut—
despite production
problems, economic
fluctuations, and a
writers' strike.**



DOORWAY TO THE IMAGINATION:
Eddie Albert and Frances Highland
tangle in an all-new *Twilight Zone*
episode entitled "Dream Me A Life."

PHOTO © 1988 CBS BROADCAST INTERNATIONAL



One touching story that has filtered back from the wilds of Toronto concerns one of the episodes I wrote, "Dream Me a Life." The script deals with a man (Eddie Albert) who has

cut himself off from the world, and from compassion, following the death of his wife; a man who—according to the narration—touches no one and is touched by no one, who suddenly finds himself in mental contact with someone who shares a similar kind of pain, and has to decide whether or not to help her—a decision that involves considerable emotional and physical danger to himself.

According to director Alan King, Albert's own wife passed away about three years ago, and the actor was deeply moved by the script. He decided to make this performance one of his best, an act of love that would stand as a permanent testimony to his wife. And from all indications, that is what he accomplished. "I've never seen an actor work so hard on an episode as Albert has on this one," said Mark Shermeline. "It's really a very moving, very touching piece."

Harry Morgan's performance in the title role of "The Curious Case of Edgar Witherspoon" has also turned out to be one of the highlights of the first batch of episodes, playing a classic eccentric who may—or may not—hold the fate of the world in his hands. Ted Shackelford as a priest whose past is catching up to him in "The Crossing" has also turned in one of the better performances, despite an ending that could have been a tad cleaner from a story perspective.

The only real danger to the production (which, according to Mark, has been almost a dream come true thus far) is the recent upward surge in the Canadian dollar (which has dramatically affected the production budget), and the ongoing writers' strike. On March seventh, when the strike hit, we had eighteen final scripts in hand, and a handful of second drafts. If the strike lasts beyond July first, the series will be forced either to enlist the support of Canadian writers, or there will be a decision to cut back the number of episodes and go with whatever is on hand. Which means that instead of thirty half-hours, there is the possibility of producing only twenty at best.

Watch this space for further developments.

WELCOME TO THE TWILIGHT ZONE

ON OCTOBER FIRST, 1987, SHORTLY AFTER SUNRISE, AN earthquake measuring six-point-one on the Richter scale jolted Southern California, doing fifty-nine million dollars in damage, unnerving a couple of million people, and encouraging quite a few others to relocate to other states. I was awakened by not only the quake, but by a strange voice coming from my living room. It was my talking Robby the Robot, which had been knocked off the bookshelf and was lying on the carpet, muttering *Welcome to Altair-4, gentlemen*, over and over.

Hearing this unfamiliar voice in my own apartment in the middle of an earthquake was a surreal and unsettling experience. I remember thinking at the time, *Welcome to the Twilight Zone* would be more like it.

Several hours later, after I'd finished picking up the debris, the phone rang. At the other end was Mark Shermeline. "Are you still alive out there?" he asked in that ever-cheerful British accent.

I allowed as how I was.

"Good. In that case, how would you like to come work on *The Twilight Zone*?"

Welcome to the *Twilight Zone*, indeed! Shake, rattle and

roll your way into a brand new gig.

My first reaction was, "This is dynamite. This is the chance I've been waiting for all my life."

The other, equally immediate reaction was "Man, oh, man, when this gets out, they're gonna kill us."

What I mean by that is best embodied by an interview I gave that appears in the May/June '88 issue of *Aboriginal SF*. I quote the pertinent question verbatim:

What special qualities are possessed by the new producer, Mark Shermeline, and you, and the other two story editors, that promise anything different, or better, than the qualities possessed by the TZ staff—Serling, producer Buck Houghton, writers Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, and Earl Hamner, Jr., et al—and by the revival version staff—Phil DeGuere, Jim Crocker, Alan Brennert, Harlan Ellison, George R.R. Martin and Rockne O'Bannon? If they couldn't make *Twilight Zone* a commercial ratings success, why do you think you can?

Oboy.

This in addition to the fact that the recent CBS *Zone* had a large budget, such well-known directors as Wes Craven and William Friedkin, and access to a wide range of short stories that they could afford to purchase.

And now, here we were: Mark Shermeline as executive producer (with I, *Claudius* to his credit), me (who had written one novel, *Demon Night*; edited two hundred TV half hours and written about sixty more—mainly in the sf, fantasy, adventure, and horror genres), and two other story editors hired to assist the production, Paul Chitlik and Jeremy Finch (whose backgrounds were primarily in sitcom writing, and who were eventually let go). We would have a much smaller budget, we couldn't afford to option many short stories (none, actually) and because we were a Canadian/American co-production, we had to use a Canadian director for every American-written script—which left in a good many fine directors, but left out the Big Names such as Craven and Friedkin and others.

And on top of that, where the network *Zone* could afford to buy two stories or so for every one they produced, we were going to produce thirty episodes, and could afford to buy only six beyond that as our safety margin. Which meant we had to pick winners thirty times out of thirty-six. If we were to try a stunt like that in Vegas and pull it off, they'd probably throw us out of the casino for spooning the slot machines.

They were gonna kill us. No two ways about it.

But we were determined to go down fighting.

The Twilight Zone was too important a show to those of us who grew up on it to even think about letting it down. It didn't matter that we didn't have huge budgets, it didn't matter that no one knew who we were, it didn't matter that we couldn't draw on the literature of sf and fantasy and horror. We would do it. Somehow. Someway.

Oboy.

On October second, we began the first of several break-fast meetings to determine what we wanted to do with the show. Mark provided us with a direction: we would try to go back to Rod Serling's approach. Stories that were humanistic, that showcased the stubborn noble honor of the human being singular, that had a moral point of view without being moralistic, that emphasized the quality of language and characterization found in the original *Zone*. Because we could not afford huge sets and special effects, we would go back to what Faulkner described as the essence of drama, "the human

heart in conflict with itself."

More than spaceships or monsters, our characters would be faced with situations and dilemmas and hard choices. We would attempt to address issues and themes that were important to us, reasonably sure that what concerned or frightened or excited us would resonate with viewers today and tomorrow and the day after that. We would choose as our topics guilt, loneliness, revenge, addiction, grief, terror, lust, romance, loss, death and the fear thereof. We would drop our characters through a crack in the sidewalk and let them come out somewhere... different, someplace just five degrees south of what we would consider our own world, where everything was recognizable but slightly a tilt and left of center.

We would attempt to recreate the *Zone* in Rod Serling's image, asking ourselves all along the way, "What would Rod do in this situation? What stories would he feel it important to tell? How can we honor his memory by doing a show that he would be proud of?"

Expanding on Mark's ideas, I drafted a writer's bible that contained all of the goals we wanted to achieve with the new series. With some cuts and a few line changes, this became a handout we called *The Vision*. With this in hand, we were off and running.

And we never looked back.

Because *they* might be gaining on us.

The next task ahead of us was to go over the leftovers from the CBS version. For days we took home stacks of scripts and outlines, twenty or thirty at a time, to read and analyze. Many of these, we discovered, had died of their own weight during the previous administration. They were too expensive, or too gruesome, or too vague, or just plain unproducible.

Finally, after reading ourselves blind, we found two scripts that were dynamite pieces of work, and (barely) within our budget. One was Tom Palmer's "Extra Innings," about a baseball player no longer able to play due to an injury, who is allowed to travel into the past, to the Golden Age of baseball, where he can play again—but at a cost.

Another was Alan Brennert's adaptation of "The Cold Equations," from a short story by Tom Godwin. Mark felt strongly that we *had* to produce it, even though we *knew*, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that it would stir up controversy, that we would be opposed at every step by those who would consider this classic of the science fiction field too grim or too downbeat. Alan's adaptation was a moving, powerful piece of writing, and we would put it on the air, period.

In the files, we also discovered a script that had not been purchased by CBS, but which George Martin had liked quite a lot. It was a story about past-life regression, entitled "Memories," by Bob Underwood. It posed an intriguing question: what kind of society would result if *everyone* were able to remember their past lives? What if grudges and resentments and wars and murder were carried through in one lifetime after another, in a constant cycle of social madness? It was, quite simply, too good an idea to pass up.

Starting on October twenty-first, we began listening to pitches from writers. Over the next five months, we were visited by such well known *sf/fantasy/horror* writers as Michael Reaves, Haskell Barkin, Dennis Etchison, D. C. Fontana, David Gerrold, Michael Cassutt, J. Marc DeMatteis, Petru Popescu, Steven Barnes, Steve Gerber, Christy Marx, Norman Spinrad, William F. Wu, George Clayton Johnson, Walter Koenig, and many more. Some ended up getting assignments, some didn't. But each of them brought us something wonderful.

We found some equally wonderful stories among the

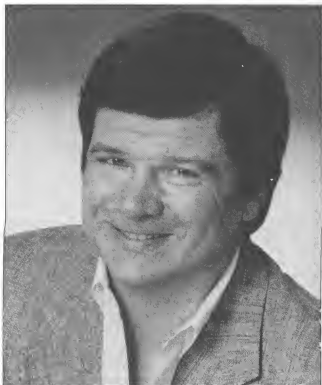


PHOTO COURTESY LONDON FILMS

Mark Shermeline—producer of the new "Zone"

lesser-known writers—as well as some stories we just couldn't use. The most frequent of these was one we called the "Whoops!" story. Typically, this was a story in which we didn't get any sense of the supernatural or the fantastic until the very end, at which time the character would discover, "Whoops! I am an alien!" or "Whoops! I'm dead!" or "Whoops! It was all a dream."

One writer actually managed to combine three or four "Whoops!" stories into one. We were so astonished at this feat that we weren't sure if we should buy the story or take it out of the office, tear it into small pieces, burn it and then scatter the ashes on the off chance that it might regenerate.

We also began receiving over-the-transom submissions from writers all over the country. At last count, we received roughly three thousand samples and spec scripts, which were read first by our reader, David Coleman (who, we hear, is recovering well now). He would then forward on those with merit to our attention. If a script passed that stage, the writer was usually invited in to pitch.

One such story was an outline called "The Hellgrammite Method," by William Selby. We bought it immediately, confident that this tale of an unusual and frightening cure for alcoholism would turn out to be one of our most unsettling stories.

The funny thing is that although we liked the basic premise—I will say only that it has something to do with a curious sort of worm—the structure didn't work. So we met with the writer and pared it down to the bare minimum, at which point we built it up again with a new structure. After the meeting, I looked over at Mark and said, "Has it occurred to you that we've just spent over six thousand dollars to buy a worm?"

And people ask me about the glamour of working in "teevee."

It was around this time that I began to ask THE QUESTION.



Finding and implementing an answer to THE QUESTION was a long process, but since I find that fans of the network *Zone* are now asking me THE QUESTION within the first few minutes of

saying hello, I will address it now rather than later.

THE QUESTION was, "What do we do about Ellison?"

For the benefit of those who have been living in the coca fields of Bolivia for the last several years, Harlan Ellison quit as creative consultant on the network *Zone* over a script called "Nackles" [see TZ, Feb. '86]. It was a Christmas story with teeth and fangs and fur and a social conscience sharp as a switchblade. CBS's last-minute decision not to produce the show, even after it had been cast with Ed Asner in the lead and was about to go into rehearsals with Harlan directing, resulted in an ultimatum: either the show stayed, or Harlan would go. Harlan went.

I wanted very much for Harlan to write for us. But there was still this nagging and somewhat unresolved issue hanging between us.

"Let it go, kiddo," Harlan told me. "It ain't worth the grief to you." Following a dinner meeting at Harlan's house, and in spite of one of the dinner guests accidentally ramming a pool cue into Harlan's art deco ceiling (don't ask), I was later able to talk Harlan into giving me the two drafts of "Nackles" that he had in his files. To no one's surprise, it was, and is, an excellent script. But we discovered something we hadn't expected.

"Nackles" was always intended to be a short, sharp punch in the gut between two longer, more upbeat Christmas stories. It was one act, no commercials, about thirteen or so pages. Because we only had half an hour to play with, we

had decided at the very start of the new *Zone* that we were not going to do any short-shorts.

Which in this case would mean restructuring the story to accommodate an act break, working in a sub-plot, and expanding the number of incidents leading up to the climax. The general consensus, and this included Harlan, was that this would substantially alter the story in a way that might not be desirable. So once again, "Nackles" bit the dust.

But this time, it wasn't because of content. No one censored the story. And that made all the difference in the world.

With Harlan now free to write for the *Zone*, if he chose, THE QUESTION now became, "How do we proceed from here?"

So I decided to get dangerous.

While I had Mark in my office, and after we had finished going over another script, I put down my coffee and looked over at him. "I would like to give Harlan a blind commitment for an outline with option for teleplay," I said. "He doesn't have to come in and pitch, he doesn't have to tell us what the story is, he doesn't have to do anything. We will simply tell him, 'Go and write. We will buy whatever it is you give to us. No holds barred. Write anything you want, so long as it's what you want to write.'"

He thought about it for a moment. You must understand that in television, this is virtually unheard of. It's probably the highest compliment you can give to a writer; one that honors his professionalism, his sacrifice, his talent, and his vision. You must also understand that I have never encountered a producer with as much courage and honor as Mark. So he could only have one reaction: "I agree," he said.

The next day, I visited Harlan at his home and brought him two gifts: a custom-made, Italian-designed pool cue and a blind assignment. "You're approved to outline," I said.

He looked at me for a long moment, trying to figure out what the hell I was talking about. "On what?"

"Anything you want."

He looked stunned. "Don't you want to know what it is?"

"Nope."

A few more seconds passed. Then he handed Susan his pool cue. "Finish up the game for me," he said, and went upstairs into his office. He began typing exactly two minutes later.

After about an hour, he came downstairs and read me the first four pages of an outline for an episode called "Crazy as a Soup Sandwich," a deal-with-the-Devil story unlike anything you've ever seen before, with a beginning that picks up where most such stories end. We received the final draft of the outline a few weeks later. I called Harlan to give him our reaction.

"You hate it, right?"

"Mark loves it. I love it. We all love it. But we have notes."

Imagine a cobra uncoiling. "Uh, hmm."

"We'd like you to consider having the protagonist a little more scared in the first scene, and you might want to cut back the locations a bit."

There was silence on the phone. "That's it?"

"That's it."

Another pause. "Y'know, this is kinda fun," Harlan said, and the intensity of his smile radiated over the phone lines like a nuclear reactor.

And THAT was how we dealt with THE QUESTION.

NEXT ISSUE: Controversy on "The Cold Equations"...What's Behind the Door?...One of Our Cats is Sick...The Twenty-Thousand-Year-Old Worrier...and: An Unexpected Package from—Rod Serling!!

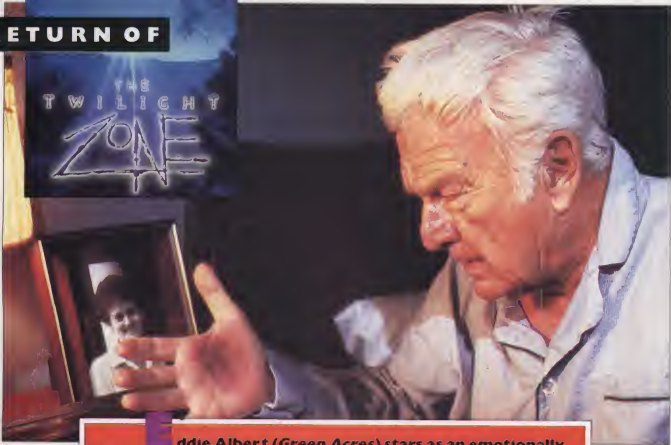
FOR MORE ZONE COVERAGE, TURN TO PAGE 52.



Harlan Ellison—answering THE QUESTION

RETURN OF

THE TWILIGHT ZONE



Eddie Albert (*Green Acres*) stars as an emotionally crippled widower in the touching "Dream Me A Life."

"We would attempt to recreate the Zone in Rod Serling's image, asking ourselves: 'How can we honor his memory by doing a show that he would be proud of?'"

—"TZ3" Story Editor
J. Michael Straczynski



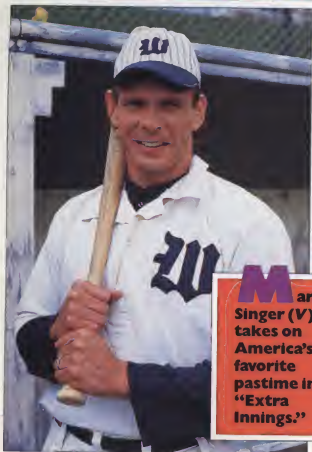
Bud Cort (*Harold and Maude*) makes a startling discovery in an episode entitled "The Trunk."

RETURN OF

THE TWILIGHT ZONE



In "The Curious Case of Edgar Witherspoon," Harry Morgan (*M*A*S*H*) just might hold the fate of the world in his hands.



Marc Singer (*V*) takes on America's favorite pastime in "Extra Innings."



Ted Shackelford (*Knots Landing*) plays a priest whose past is catching up to him in "The Crossing."

IF ROD SERLING WERE ALIVE AND working today, I believe he'd be both gratified and infuriated. He'd be pleased to see that the kinds of stories he loved—science fiction, magical fantasy, and supernatural terror—now enjoy enormous popularity in bookstores and at the box office.

But I think he'd also be intensely frustrated that the form that has been so successful in fiction and film has never managed to reach its potential on the small screen.

Science fiction and suspense/horror shows have never really done well on network television. (CBS's *Beauty and the Beast* and NBC's *Alf* are among the few network fantasy shows this fall.) Rod Serling's original *Twilight Zone* ran six years on CBS, yet few others have managed to last even two years. Even *Star Trek* had an uphill battle, and only a massive letter-writing campaign allowed it to last three years. The real success of these shows only came in reruns and syndication, and in the sequels and follow-ups they've inspired.

But all that's changing. The same kinds of shows that have failed on network television are now enjoying enormous success in syndication—so much so that independent production companies are now bypassing the networks entirely and producing original sf and fantasy series directly for local stations and cable channels. In fact, Paramount's *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Friday the 13th: The Series* are among the highest-rated shows in syndication today.

There's an irony here. At the same time that CBS's revived *Twilight Zone* and Steven Spielberg's *Amazing Stories* on NBC were proving less than profitable for the networks, over one hundred original half-hour fantasy dramas were being produced for syndication and cable on such shows as *Tales from the Darkside*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *The Hitchhiker*, and *Ray Bradbury Theatre*, earning very real profits for their producers. And, though the '85-'86 *Twilight Zone* was a disappointment in the U.S., it's been doing land-office business overseas. That's the reason that CBS Broadcast International—the company's foreign arm—has decided to finance original episodes for syndication. [See J. Michael Straczynski's article in this issue.—ED.]

One theory that explains this paradox is the idea of what programmers call "narrowcasting"—producing for specialized markets. For a network program to be considered a success, it must reach tens of millions of viewers at the same time, despite growing competition from cable, VCR "time-shifting," and home video rentals. Local stations need only a fraction of those numbers. They can program syndicated sf and fantasy shows when they want to, in a time-slot appropriate to their local viewers' needs, and they split the ad revenue with the producers, without having to pass any of it along to the network. And there are more than enough local viewers interested in sf, fantasy, and horror to keep the local stations very, very happy. (For some locals, the ratings for *Star Trek: The Next Generation* were two to three hundred percent greater than the ratings of the programs it replaced.) With ratings performances like that, we're likely to see a lot more original programming for syndication and cable.

Of course, the syndicated shows often have much lower budgets than network programs do, which can affect story quality and production values. But as Rod Serling himself proved, it is talent and imagination that create effective fantasy television, not flashy effects.

Below is a listing of what's in store for fans of science fiction, fantasy, and horror in the coming season in syndication and on cable. Though the Writers Guild strike (still going on as this is written) has delayed production on several of these shows, it still promises to be an interesting season. Be sure to check your local listings for the air-dates and times in your area.

FALL TV PREVIEW

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ROD SERLING

OR:
Fantasy
Television is
Alive and
Well in
Syndication
and Cable



PHOTO © 1985 LAUREL-TV, INC.

FEATURE BY CRAIG MILLER

WAR OF THE WORLDS



PHOTO © 1988 PARAMOUNT PICTURES CORPORATION

▲ WAR OF THE WORLDS

Buoyed by the success of the new *Star Trek*, Paramount is producing a new science fiction series which is a sequel to the 1953 Paramount film version of H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*. Herb and Greg Strangis, a father-and-son team of writer/producers, have put together what seems to be a fairly well-thought-out package.

The underlying premise is that at the end of the *The War of the Worlds* movie, the aliens weren't actually killed, they just went into a kind of hibernation. Now, in 1988, the aliens start to wake up. (It turns out they weren't Martians, after all.) Deprived of their ships and most of their weaponry, the aliens must switch from a war of conquest, as depicted in the 1953 film, to a covert, guerrilla action.

Each hour-long episode will tell a complete story in the ongoing battle for domination of the Earth.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION ►

The breakaway success of the made-for-syndication genre, *ST:TNG* returns this fall with a full season of new episodes and all of the previous season's cast except Denise Crosby, who played security officer Tasha Yar. According to Gene Roddenberry, this season will fill in more of the background of several of the characters. "You'll also see some interesting relationships develop between them," he noted in a recent interview.



PHOTO © 1988 PARAMOUNT PICTURES CORPORATION

THE MUNSTERS TODAY ▶

MCA Television is producing this independent half-hour television series. All the old favorites will be back, played by an entirely new cast. John Schuck (*McMillan and Wife*) plays Herman, and Lee Meriwether (*Barnaby Jones*) is Lily. The irrepressible Grandpa will be played by Howard Morton (*Gimme a Break*). Eddie and Marilyn will be brought back to life by newcomers Jason Marsden and seventeen-year-old Hilary Van Dyke, respectively. As a new publicity gambit, the show will be launched with a thirty-city live shopping mall presentation called *The Munsters' Magic Show*.



PHOTO © 1988 MCA TV



◀ RAY BRADBURY THEATRE

Ray Bradbury acts as host for this series of half-hour adaptations he's written based on some of his short stories. The first six episodes were done expressly for Home Box Office (HBO), the premium channel, but the twelve episodes being produced now are truly international.

The series is now a co-production of Atlantis Films (Canada), Ellipse Programme (France), and Granada Television (England). One third of the new episodes are being produced in each of the three countries, although all of the episodes are being shot in English. Each production company will supply prominent actors and directors for the episodes shot in its country. Some of the actors include Robert Vaughn, Helen Shaver, Eugene Levy, Donald Pleasance, Denholm Elliott, and Alan Bates.

Bradbury selects which of his stories to adapt, with input from his wife, his agent, and the production company. "We all go through my books and make lists of our choices. Then I compare the selections. It's remarkable how often we all come up with the same stories." The adapted stories have so far included "The Crowd," "Marionettes, Inc.," "Banshee," "Tyrannosaurus Rex," "The Man Upstairs," and "The Small Assassin."

The series airs on the USA cable channel in the United States and on Global Net in Canada.

FALL TV PREVIEW

PHOTO © 1987 NEW LINE CINEMA



◀ FREDDY'S NIGHTMARES

Like several other anthology series scheduled for fall release, this new entry from New Line Cinema and Lorimar has been delayed by the Writers Guild strike. Although the concept for the series is still not firm, it will consist of two linked half-hour episodes set in the small town of Springwood. Designed to capitalize on the success of the popular horror/fantasy films and their cult-villain Freddy Krueger, the series will use Freddy both as host and as an occasional character in the stories. Since it's aimed at a late-night audience, the violence is likely to be more graphic than on prime-time series.

OUT OF THIS ▶ WORLD

This sitcom started life as part of the abortive NBC Comedy Block—five half-hour syndicated situation comedies, each run once a week in the seventeenth time slot on the NBC owned-and-operated stations as well as on many NBC affiliates.

The science fiction series stars Donna Pescow (*Angie*) as the human wife of an alien forced to return to his own planet. The comic element derives from their daughter, a little girl (played by Maureen Flannigan) whose "out of this world" abilities arose with the onset of puberty.

According to Production Coordinator Jeff Turner, "We look at it as a family show, rather than science fiction. It's about the predicaments she gets into."



PHOTO © 1987 MCA

FALL TV PREVIEW



◀ FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE SERIES

The title of this series is deceptive. The only connection between the show and the movies of the same name is just that, the name. Also the producer, Frank Mancuso, Jr. Otherwise, the stories have absolutely no relation to the hockey-masked slasher, Jason. In fact, for one shot in which the camera pans around the cluttered and cursed antique shop that is the show's setting, the filmmakers were specifically forbidden from including a hockey mask as one of the cursed items in the tableau.

The series uses recurring characters to introduce each episode, but the stories follow an anthology format. According to Executive Story Editor Bill Taub, when the show started they were "looking toward a much lighter touch, more comic than the films." But as they started developing the stories, it became clear that the show needed a hard edge, but with a careful eye toward violence. "The shows are somewhat violent, but only as the story revolves around the violence. We don't use violence for its own sake. The shows are Faustian in nature," says Taub.



◀ TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE

The first program to prove that the anthology format could work successfully in syndicated television was *Tales from the Darkside*, from George Romero's Laurel Entertainment company. Altogether about ninety half hours have been shot, and most of them have aired at least once in local syndication markets. However, there are still about a half dozen that have not been seen. They should be appearing this fall. Although there are no plans to shoot more *Darkside* episodes, Lorimar will be pitching the series as a five-day "strip" series aimed at a fall 1989 debut.

MONSTERS

Laurel's next anthology project is *Monsters*, a new half-hour series focusing on scary creatures. Though it too is stalled by the Writers Guild strike, its producers have high hopes for the show.

"This is Monster-of-the-Week," says Executive Producer and co-creator Richard P. Rubinstein. "Each week is a new and different creature from the week before. And our definition of a creature is pretty broad."

Mitchell Gatlin, the other co-creator and Executive in Charge of Production, adds that the show will run "from arch comedy to the Gothic. The stories will be scary, but there'll be a range, as in *Tales from the Darkside*."

The two creators feel that the anthology format gives a degree of freedom that isn't available with ensemble series. "You can do anything," says Gatlin. "You don't have continuing characters. You can tell whatever story you want to tell and don't need to worry about actors you have to service."

Monsters is shooting in Los Angeles and New York, with about forty percent of the stories based on classic tales by such writers as Robert Bloch, Stephen King, and Manly Wade Wellman. Top special-effects makeup artist Dick Smith is coordinating makeup effects for the series. ■



H

HALLOWEEN HAUNTS

the New York subways every night of the year. Halloween night itself was almost an anticlimax. Max Aronson crossed his long legs, yawned, and watched the rush-hour parade coming in through the open subway doors. A young punker strained beneath the weight of a colossal boom box atop his shoulders, a sonic parody of Atlas and his terrestrial burden. *"Hold tight,"* wailed the Talking Heads, the throbbing music filling up the car, *"we're in for nasty weather. There has got to be a way—burning down the house...."* Two old men dropped huge plastic bags onto the two remaining empty seats. They stood there in the swaying car, regarding them affectionately. Halloween masks hung from elastics around their necks. From Max's angle, the mask faces were hidden and indeterminate, waiting to latch on to living flesh. A silent old woman opposite Max was also watching the bags. He fancied that he could take a fold of her wrinkled, sagging flesh and tug it right off.

Max was on his first night assignment. His WWEN-TV badge was tucked away in his wallet, his beeper snuggled to his belt, and his pocket notebook lost somewhere in his trenchcoat. He ►

Some reporters can't rest until all the legwork on a story is done. As Max Aronson will find out this Halloween night, that legwork can lead down forgotten roads to the past and to answers that are far from normal . . .

A
HALLOWEEN TALE
BY
JOHN TIBBETTS

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN LÄBBE

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OVERTIME

still felt the pop-eyed Midwesterner who saw too much and felt too much—who hadn't been able yet to anesthetize himself to the excess and the spillover.

Overhead on the opposite wall in the flickering light he could read the graffiti scrawl: "Mama was right."

He considered that, seriously.

It was the lost end of a Friday night—the worst time to be chasing down stories. And it was no way to spend Halloween. For Aronson this night had always meant other things, things folded safely back inside the melting Midwestern bonfires and acrid, streaking candle wax. A night's horrors had been only delicious games to play.

The Talking Heads were curdling

Pee-wee Herman masks. Today's monsters wear bow-ties, Aronson decided.

The car made its turn, picked up speed, and was now running alongside another train, tracking it in the darkness. It was brightly lit inside. For a few seconds Aronson saw through his window frame other, tinier window frames across the dark void—each with its own Halloween face. *Flick-eta-flick-eta-flicketaflicketaflicketa*. . . . The frames of light flashed by, falling into tired darkness. *Flick-eta-flick-eta flicketaflicketa*. Like a jerky old silent movie. Max had noticed the curious effect many times. He'd been in New York nine months—long enough to get over the sad, wistful reaction to the sight.

smells—crouching in your nose. He kicked through a blowing pile of wet newspapers. He missed autumn leaves. Real autumn leaves. Piles of them blazing away in bonfires, blazing away in the dark.

"Burning down the house. . . ."

One block further and there was the loft. The City Ballet was holding a costume party for its sponsors. Rich folks who wouldn't be caught dead at a concert would flock to this godforsaken neighborhood. He shivered, drawing his coat together at the blast of wind. Somewhere around there would be the camera truck, Guerrero pissed off that he was late. Really, Aronson realized, he was a nobody here, still the new kid on the newsbeat. Still the guy who yearned back to Midwestern witching nights and who still shrank from Halloween fumbblings in high-rise office buildings and subway cars. Still afraid of old men with jack-o'-lantern teeth.

He saw the WWEN news truck double-parked in front of the loft's address. It looked awful. Its windows were streaked with mud and the once-white sides were grimed with soot and sand. You could hardly see the station logo with its graffiti-like words: WWEN—News "WWEN" You Need It.

Guerrero must have blown in from a story. The slight, fiercely dark cameraman was the terror of the WWEN newsroom. He had a mind of his own about a story. He'd shoot it his way or hand you the camera to do it better. He always intimidated Aronson, somehow. He was so *sure* about everything. . . .

A cab with its overhead light on almost clipped Aronson crossing the street. A figure emerged from the news truck. It wasn't Guerrero.

The cameraman looked up. In the blowing light he was just a dark silhouette. "Hi," he said slowly, extending a hand. "I'm Crossfield. You're new, huh?" Although he said it more as a declaration than a question. "Haven't seen you before. You're late."

Aronson grumbled about the choked subway lines. "I don't usually work this shift," he said.

"Me, I'm on overtime." Crossfield went around to the back of the truck and flung open the rear doors.

"We've been rerouted tonight." He twisted his head back toward Aronson as his hands expertly took inventory of the clutter of tripods, light stands, and cartridge belts.

"No City Ballet stuff, then?"

"Hell, no. We've got a story. Pammy radioed in just now to get over to the East Side. Alphabet City. A bunch of

The intersection was ablaze with light. Furniture, trash bags, crates, clothes, and rags had been piled high in a tower of leaping flame. Hissing and popping, the fire licked hungrily at the lowering night. Hideous silhouettes of the street people danced and gyrated around the pyre.

the bumping, lurching car. He saw a girl with a young dancer's body and haggard old woman's face. What did that face know that the body didn't? She carried a canvas satchel stuffed with orange and lime-green fabrics. Something wrapped up inside them clanked. *Clanked?* The Puerto Rican next to her had followed her on. No doubt he would follow her off. His eyes weren't just hungry, they were greedy.

"Burning down the house. . . ."

Opposite the girl was an old man in a three-piece suit stained with pea soup. He'd been there since Aronson had gotten on at Fifty-ninth Street. He hadn't looked up once—not at anybody. Maybe he knew when to get off by instinct—or was he planning to get off at all? Maybe he lived here in this car. Maybe he'd been here all his life. Or maybe he only materialized here on Halloween nights. There were even a few kids standing at the end wearing

Long enough, but it remained anyway.

He got off at West Fourth, leaving the burning house and the dancer and the hungry man to their private battles. The old man still hadn't moved. But at the last minute as Max slid through the doors, he had quickly looked up at them and grinned, his mouth opening a vast maw, disclosing an uneven row of jack-o'-lantern teeth.

Max shivered, shouldering his way through the hurrying people, skipping over the pools of water on his way to the turnstile. It was always wet down here, he knew. Where did the water come from? Even during the recent drought, there had been water down here. As if it had seeped up from dark lakes under the subterranean tunnels.

SIX O'CLOCK NOW. THERE WAS NO TWILIGHT Outside. Only glaring streetlights below the hovering darkness. Only hard asphalt and pungent smells—bitter, acid

kids have started a street bonfire. Could be trouble."

Aronson flinched slightly. Hard news wasn't his beat. The ritzy-ditzy arts scene was bad enough without street fires.

"I thought Guerrero was around tonight."

Crossfield swung into the truck. "Pammy couldn't call him up—too much radio noise. Here, get in. We've got to move. You can take the cassette back by subway to the studio afterwards. I'm on overtime and have to get to the motorpool when we're done."

Aronson barely made it into the cab before Crossfield jammed the gears and spun off toward Houston. As they shot into the intersection, he spotted another WWEN truck at the light.

"Hey!" he yelled. "That must be Guerrero!"

Crossfield chuckled, a low rumbling deep in his throat. "Guess he got Pammy's call after all. Let him cover it. Just his cup of tea."

While he talked, Aronson noticed that Crossfield was as grimy as the truck. His features were ruddy even in the shadows. There was a hard set to the grime-streaked jaw. Even when he laughed there was something intense and serious in the eyes.

"How long have you been at the station?" Aronson asked.

Crossfield hunched toward the windshield, newly splattered by a sudden gust of rain. Steam misted the glass. He twisted on the defroster.

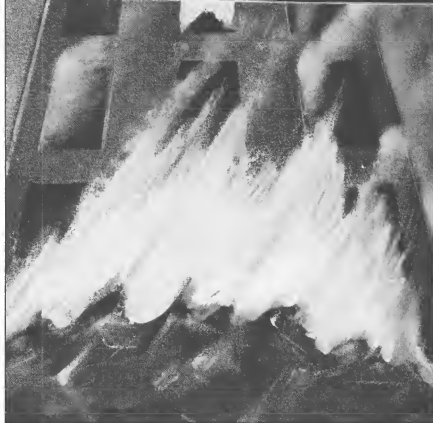
"Too long," he said after a pause. He punched on the two-way. "Remote Unit Five to Base," he called.

Heavy static came back.

But Crossfield listened intently then looked over at Aronson. "No other units there yet," he said. "We'll get there first." He said it with relish. The eyes popped and crackled. "All the best stuff happens like this. On overtime. But that's all right. I like it."

A dying breed, thought Aronson. Or at least one he had never seen back in Missouri. This guy's a real newshound.

THEY SPED CROSSTOWN. THEY HAD amazing luck with the lights. Ordinarily, this would be bad-news time for automobile traffic, but the streets cleared as they approached Avenue B. Along the curbs the gallery of grotesques lined up for inspection. Stiffly, the bag ladies, the bums, the lanky leather-punks, the multi-tinted hookers and the gray businessmen flashed by the steamy windows. Each would freeze for a split second in the window frame and then



fall away into the darkness to be replaced by another. He remembered so many autumns of years past when his crowd would all dress up in the wild patches and clothes that cluttered their attics and parade around for that one magical night of Halloween. They thought nothing of putting on the masks of pain and the rags of the street for just a few hours—and loving it. Here, though... here these people on the streets flashing by had to wear the masks all the time.

Crossfield gunned the truck just past the changing yellow light at the next intersection, turning sharply up Avenue B. The truck's interior was quite warm now and they both had to keep wiping the steam off the inside windows. Aronson glanced at the speedometer.

"Holy smoke!" he exclaimed.

"Whassa matter?" Crossfield smiled that strange, fierce smile. As the street-light reflections swept across his forehead, Aronson could see several deeply pitted scars. "We'll get there in time, won't we?" He said it proudly and urgently. "And listen," he continued, his voice falling into a professional rhythm. "When we get there, let's set up for the talking heads last. You scout the crowd and the firemen while I get the B-roll inside the building."

"Firemen? Building? What are you talking about?"

Crossfield was suddenly flustered. "I mean—I mean, if that fire spreads, there'll be hell to pay. We'd best be ready."

Aronson sat back against the cushions, heart pounding. This was happening too fast. But he was distract-

ed again as they turned up a narrow alleyway near Sixth. It was pitch dark now and only the oily light of the headlights guided them between the sprawled trashcans and the clumps of litter and paper.

There was a point of light ahead. They lurched toward it and were out of the alley and braking to a stop.

"Burning down the house..."

The street was ablaze with light. Furniture, trash bags, crates, clothes, and rags had been piled high in a tower of leaping flame. Hissing and popping, the fire licked hungrily at the lowering night. Hideous silhouettes of the street people danced and gyrated around the pyre. Heavy-metal sounds groaned and wailed through the trembling night air.

"What the hell do we do with this?" Aronson panicked. He was out of his element and knew it.

But Crossfield had already leaped out of the cab and was hauling out the equipment from the rear doors.

"Are you kidding?" he shouted scornfully. He was impatient to be away. "Get the story," he ordered. "I'll be back!"

He plunged into the heart of the pandemonium. Aronson just stood there, stupidly, his memory seeking the security of other, safer Halloweens—when they had all danced around the piles of blazing leaves, tracking with their eyes the thousands of sparks flying upward. He could still remember the heat and sweat inside the scratchy mask as the bonfire whirled and danced before his eyes so many years ago.

But this was now and the fire was still burning. Crossfield was sprinting across the street, his camera balanced

OVERTIME

on his shoulder as if it weighed no more than a feather. But instead of stopping near the blaze, he ran on past and disappeared up the front steps of a tenement apartment on the corner. Aronson dismissed his surprise when he realized that the cameraman was seeking an aerial vantage point of the scene. A good newsman trusts his cameraman, he muttered to himself wryly as he belted his coat and ran up to the fire, notebook plucked from his pocket.

He got a quick head count and was casting about for some likely interviews when suddenly a loud *whump!* came from the apartment building. Shouts rose up all around him as a column of flame shot out of the lower floor, followed by another explosion. Instantly, the building became a pillar of fire,

dwarfing the street activity. The crowd froze in place for an instant and suddenly became a jostling mass of elbows and knees as everyone scrambled back for safety. Aronson was hit from two directions and he crumpled to the pavement.

He was momentarily stunned. Throbbing red lights swelled and diminished, focused and ran somewhere inside his head. A hollow roaring, palpable and wet, filled his ears. Sometimes it boomed and groaned from a great distance. And sometimes it screamed nearby—

Screams were all around him now. People were pouring from the windows and doors of the apartment, a crimson stream. They were on fire. Like living torches they carried flames through the

streets, touching off more fires, more torches, as they passed and burned. They ran right into the arriving firetrucks, crumpling under the wheels.

Steely fingers gripped Aronson's shoulder, hard. "Get up!" a voice demanded. "You've got to get out of here!" Aronson was wrenched to his feet, vision bleary and a knocking pain punching at his kidneys. The screams and the flames were everywhere. Burning flesh seemed to melt and drip, like hot tallow.

It was Crossfield, his face cracked with bruises and burns. Smoke lifted from his shredded overalls. But there he was with that infernal camera still mounted to his shoulder. "I've got what I need," he was saying. "I've got the bastard. Now it's up to you." He half-carried Aronson back to the police cordon out of the way of the snaking cables and hoses. "Go on!" he said. "It's your story now."

Aronson shook his head several times. He tasted blood at the corner of his mouth while people were dying all around him.

In a dream he took Crossfield's microphone. There was the police chief, over there some firemen setting up their command post—and he talked. At first he couldn't find his voice. It had gotten lost somewhere inside him. But it came at his bidding and he talked on and on, always Crossfield there before him, shooting, camera rock steady at his shoulder.

"Hey, Aronson!" The shout lifted above the confusion. "What the hell!" It was Guerrero struggling through the crowd toward the cordon. The voice broke the spell and Aronson let go and crumpled to the pavement. Guerrero ran to him and retrieved the notebook and field tape on the pavement. He shook him and looked about wildly, mutely questioning.

"Let's get out of here," he shouted to the crumpled form. "What the hell!" He was crying now. "What the hell!"

And all Aronson remembered was that voice, crying over and over, far away, a pale wraith of sound blowing by and losing itself in the distance; a leaf twirling in slow motion, diminishing, fading, losing itself in the October nightmare.

THERE YOU GO. YOU'LL MAKE IT. I'VE got Guerrero on the editor." Pammy was a tough assignment editor with a detached air that had not betrayed emotion in all the nine months Aronson had known her. Until now. Now, the steady lights of the late-night newsroom backlit that godawful new hair-

ULTIMATE TRIVIA QUIZ ANSWERS

FROM PAGE 21

DIMENSION I

1. "No Time Like the Past"
2. "Showdown with Rance McGrew"
3. "Little Girl Lost" (by Richard Matheson)
4. "The Trade-Ins"
5. "Time Enough at Last"

DIMENSION II

1.c,2.b,3.c,4.c,5.a

DIMENSION III

- a. 6, 13, 24
- b. 11, 25
- c. 12, 28
- d. 1, 2
- e. 7, 17
- f. 8 (Anne Francis—Photo 1), 19
- g. 18, 21
- h. 4, 16, 22
- i. 4, 10
- j. 3, 15

WHAT'S YOUR ZONE DEGREE?

Were you able to answer all of the questions in our quiz? Now it's time to rate yourself to determine your "Zone Degree." To find out, review the answers and score yourself as indicated for each section.

236-150 points: Congratulations! You have earned a **DOCTOR OF ZONE-LOGY**. You scored higher than most of the editors here!

- k. 9, 20, 23
- l. 5, 27, 30
- m. 14, 23, 26 (William Shatner—

Photo 2), 29, 31
(Yes, we know Robert Lansing was a guest star. Give yourself five extra points!)

THE FOURTH DIMENSION

1. Kevin McCarthy, Billy Mumy, Patricia Barry, and William Schallert
2. Jerry Sohl
3. Carol Burnett
4. General Foods and Kimberly-Clark
5. Death Valley
6. Antioch College
7. "The Trouble with Templeton"
8. A blue lens filter, used to create stormy skies
9. "Five Characters in Search of an Exit"
10. "Valley of the Shadow"

150-100 points: RESIDENT TZ EXPERT. There's no foolin' you. Although you have discovered the medicine of good television, there are still a few facts you must gather.

100-50 points: TWILIGHT INTERN. Like most interns, you don't know as much as you think you do, but you're always learning from experience. Keep watching, you'll get there!

50 points or less: You're either under fifteen years of age or an expert on Mr. Ed instead. Hit the tube, and try again.

style. Around her was Sawyer, the dispatcher, Slais the eleven o'clock producer, and somebody he'd never seen before. Must be Legal Department.

Aronson gulped the last of the second cup of coffee. He began to realize that try as he might he would not be able to keep the screams and the burning from his mind. How Guerrero had gotten him out of there would always be a mystery. He glanced toward one of the editing bays where Steve crouched before the video screen running the cassette.

"—still don't know what the hell you were doing clear over in Alphabet City," Pammy was saying. Her eyes blinked behind the thick glasses. "Jesus—" "Hey, guys!" Guerrero suddenly shouted. "Look at this!"

He had rolled the tape past the stand-up interviews. Everyone crowded into the cramped bay. There on the small screen was something remarkable indeed.

Guerrero punched "forward." The screen came alive. It was a high-angle view of the dancing crowd circling the bonfire on the street. "Now watch," he muttered. He moved to "fast forward" for a few seconds then slowed to regular speed. Once again, the view disclosed dozens of figures below, dancing and gesticulating wildly.

"Jeez, what a shot!" Pammy couldn't help her admiration.

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Guerrero. "Here it is. Now."

Suddenly in that tiny screen something unexpected happened. A tiny figure detached itself from the thronging crowd and, walking backwards, furtively approached the trunk of a parked car. He opened it, withdrew a bundle, and darted to the base of the apartment building, directly below the vantage point of the camera. The figure looked up, directly into the camera lens. Then he disappeared inside. The camera's field of vision was empty now; yet the camera did not move. Seconds passed.

"What the—" Aronson stopped. The figure reemerged, running pell-mell now. It disappeared quickly back into the dancing crowd. Moments later something shook the camera. Clouds of dark smoke suddenly boiled up and past the lens, obscuring the entire street.

Pammy breathed. "Arson," she said, cigarette smoke trailing from her nose. "That's no accident. That son-of-a-bitch started it! Steve! Run it back again! How well can we see that guy's face?"

"Wait! That's not all!" Guerrero punched in "search" and moved fast for-

ward into the tape. The images flickered swiftly by. Numbly, Aronson watched the accelerated patches and flashes of light—carnage and death at the fast speed, *flick-eta-flick-eta flick-etaflicketa*. Like the subway windows out there in the dark. *Flick-eta-flick-eta flicketaflicketa*.

The machine slowed and there was Aronson with the microphone suddenly, talking to the fireman, while smoke and ash roiled around them. It didn't seem real to Aronson, not like this, not that tiny little scream crouching there in the little screen—

"Now," murmured Guerrero. "This is unbelievable."

Right in the middle of the interview the camera began drifting away from Aronson, slowly panning the crowd, now safely behind the cordon rope. It panned once, left to right, then partway back again—

And stopped. The focal length changed and the camera zoomed suddenly forward into a portion of the crowd, inexorably picking out and isolating a face.

"I don't get it," Aronson said. Then the truth dawned on him.

"Play it back," ordered Pammy.

Guerrero smiled grimly and reversed it. Then forward again.

It was the same man; the one who had mysteriously run into the building with the bundle, seconds before the explosion. It was unmistakable. Other people jostled all around him, screaming and crying—

But he was just smiling quietly to himself.

Then everything exploded in the newsroom. Pammy whooped. The eleven o'clock producer reached for the telephone to Ops. Aronson, still dazed, groped for his notebook. "Son of a bitch!" Pammy kept saying. "Son of a bitch!" It was pandemonium. It was the story every newsman hungers for—

But at an unseen cue, the shouting stopped.

Strangled silence. Pammy walked back a bit unsteadily toward Aronson. "You never answered my question," she said. "Where'd you say you shot that?"

"Wha—off the alley near B and Sixth."

"Slais! Still nothing on the two-way about a fire over there?"

Nothing.

Pammy wheeled toward Guerrero. "Steve!" Her voice cracked a bit. "Who did you say was with Aronson over there?"

"I didn't. By the time I got to him, there was no one. Just the cassette. I

thought you had assigned somebody—"

Pammy was turning on Aronson. "How'd you know about the fire, anyway? I thought you were in place at that loft party..." She stopped then. Just stopped. Typewriters and computer terminals hummed and whirled placidly around them. The sporadic squawk of the two-way lapsed momentarily into silence. Pammy didn't forget things, you know. That's what made her the best WVEN had ever had. She didn't ever forget.

And now she remembered.

"Your cameraman," she said dully, face drained white in the newsroom light. "What did you say his name was?"

Aronson shrank back from her quiet manner.

"I didn't get his first name—" he began.

"Max! Goddamit, what was his name?"

ARONSON FOUND THE STORY IN WVEN's Aclip file. Another building had blown up a year ago to the day—on Halloween night. It had claimed seven occupants, victims of a tragic accident—touched off by a stupid bonfire party in the nearby street. Regrettably the building's owner, who had been on the scene, had collected the insurance, and then turned over the property, at a considerable profit, to the city for redevelopment.

At least, that was all the story anyone knew. Only one reporter had been on the scene, a veteran cameraman named Crossfield, working overtime. Not even his bones were recovered from the inferno.

CROSSFIELD'S FOOTAGE AIRED AT ELEVEN; A grim counterpoint to the Halloween Happy News of parties and parades. They flashed the Hotline number over that stillframed face with its death's-head grin, and the phones caught fire.

They ran Crossfield's name in the end-crawl, along with the other cameramen, and they all drank a toast to his memory, before agreeing to forget it had ever happened.

But Aronson would not forget his baptism of fire: that haunted, smoke-stained face, the anguished cries, the leaping flames that were still burning. It was a hungry blaze that would not die. A fire that kept growing, consuming his memories of other, happier times. ■

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TZ INTERVIEW



DAVID CRONENBERG

The gifted director of Scanners, Videodrome, The Dead Zone, and The Fly talks about terror, humanity, and the cinema of pathology on the set of his new shocker, Dead Ringers.



OME FILMMAKERS—SUCH AS D.W. GRIFFITH, SERGI EISENSTEIN, and David Lean—work with a telescopic lens. They see the world primarily in broad, epic terms. But Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg views the universe through a microscope, and in his films he strives relentlessly (and graphically) to show us what he sees when he looks through that lens: namely, the unspeakable horror of dividing cells.

In *Shivers* (aka *They Came from Within*), *Rabid*, *The Brood*, *Scanners*, *Videodrome*, *The Dead Zone*, and *The Fly*, David Cronenberg has often used disease as both his subject and his form. In *Shivers* (a prophetic work once described as the "first venereal horror film"), alien parasites invade the promiscuous inhabitants of a modern, apartment complex, turning them into grotesquely diseased killers. In *Rabid*, radical surgery transforms porn star Marilyn Chambers into a modern-day Typhoid Mary. In *The Brood*, Samantha Eggart plays a disturbed woman who literally gives birth to her own psychoses. An experimental drug given to mothers in the fifties creates a generation of malevolent, baby-boomer telepaths in *Scanners*.

In *Videodrome*—a film Andy Warhol reportedly described as "the Clockwork Orange of the eighties"—a "pirated" cable television program transforms James Woods into a human VCR programmed to kill. In *The Dead Zone*, a sickly clairvoyant is plagued by visions of evil. And in *The Fly*—heralded as the first science fiction film whose subtext was AIDS—a young scientist enters a Kafkaesque nightmare world, and his physical disintegration mirrors his emotional decay.

In each disturbing case, Cronenberg's central conceit is a kind of existential Moebius loop: illness is a metaphor for the metaphor is us.

In his new film, titled *Dead Ringers*, the Toronto-based filmmaker continues to explore the pathological nature of human existence, this time focusing on a real and relatively

common—if enduringly mysterious—biological phenomenon.

Inspired by *Twins*—the best-selling 1977 novel by Bari Wood and Jack Geasland—the eight-million-dollar film tells the story of twin gynecologists Elliot and Beverly Mantle (Jeremy Irons in a dual role), who operate a thriving, internationally famous "fertility" clinic in Toronto. Elliot, the more confident of the two, is a suave, womanizing sophisticate with expensive habits. His brother, Beverly, is the more introspective and timid of the two—at least on the surface—because despite these differences, the two brothers are eerily, "biologically" alike. In fact, the "binary system" that unites them also threatens to destroy them, especially when Beverly develops an intimate relationship with a mysterious Frenchwoman named Claire Niveau (Genevieve Bujold).

The film, which recalls the case of Dr. Stewart L. Marcus and his brother, Dr. Cyril C. Marcus, twin gynecologists who died under extremely bizarre circumstances in Manhattan in 1975, is Cronenberg's most realistic to date. But that didn't make it any easier to cast. Rumor has it that Al Pacino and Robert DeNiro were offered the dual title role. But they insisted the brothers' profession be changed to something less "controversial."

"You'd be surprised how many American actors will play killers, but won't play gynecologists," said Cronenberg, who explained further that Jeremy Irons was his first choice once he'd decided to find a European actor to play the double role.

Born in Toronto in 1943, David Cronenberg is the son of accomplished parents (his father was a writer and editor of, among other things, *True Canadian Crime Stories*; his mother, a pianist). As an undergraduate at the University of Toronto, Cronenberg switched from a science to a literature major in midstream, and as a student he directed two short films in sixteen millimeter, "Transfer" and "From the Drain." His first thirty-five millimeter films, "Stereo" and "Crimes of the Future," ▶

B Y J A M E S V E R N I E R E

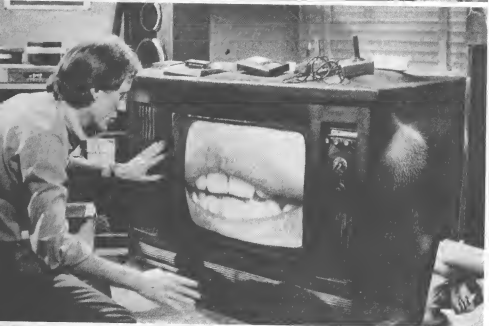
TZ INTERVIEW



"When you're a kid, you don't necessarily think that everybody dies. You have to learn it and assimilate it. In a sense, that's the moment of original sin."

The Brood, 1979

PHOTO © 1979 NEW WORLD PICTURES



"I have some amusement with the notion that there's such a thing as realistic filmmaking. It's an illusion, and I always play with that."

Videodrome, 1982

PHOTO © 1983 UNIVERSAL CITY STUDIOS



"Medieval literature and imagery have always appealed to me—the medieval sensibility in which death was a very real character, the idea of purification."

The Dead Zone, 1983

PHOTO © 1983 PARAMOUNT PICTURES CORP

were shot in the late sixties, and the critical response to them established Cronenberg—perhaps the only truly cerebral filmmaker at work in popular film today—as one of the most promising young directors in North America.

TZ: If there is a trend in your films, it is your continuing fascination with biological or human oddities. Do you think that's a reasonable observation?

CRONENBERG: It's funny, but I've never really thought of it that way. I suppose that what we're talking about is seeing the world as a child, for whom everything is an oddity. I mean, the first time you meet a grasshopper, it's very odd. TZ: So it's a general view of existence as odd or shockingly different.

CRONENBERG: I think so because I'm not obsessed with freaks. There are people that have been, but I'm not. I am, however, interested in—for example—the study of insects. Everything is an oddity in that world. Every insect has a bizarre history and life cycle. It eats this kind of plant and then it turns into something else. Seeing as a child and studying insects are connected for me, and it's probably part of an attempt to shock myself out of complacency.

TZ: You were an amateur entomologist as a child. Are you still?

CRONENBERG: Yes, I still am. I don't collect specimens, but I read books on the subject, and I have a place in the country where I observe them in their natural state.

TZ: The last time we spoke, you not-so-jokingly referred to *The Fly* as a "nature film." Many feel that insect "nature" films are among the most unwatchable films in existence, primarily because the world they reveal is so heartless, so cruel, alien, and violent.

CRONENBERG: But you have to take a step back. If you approach that material as a normal human being, you start to identify with it, which—I think—is the problem you're having. It is horrible from that point of view, brutal and horrible. But insects are different from us. They're totally other.

TZ: At the same time, however, you used that inclination to identify with the insect to give *The Fly* an added shiver.

CRONENBERG: That's true, and the game I was playing was: "You want to be totally horrified, but I don't want you to be." I didn't want the audience to detach itself from the horror.

TZ: You've also expressed an interest in a film biography of director Tod Browning, whose seminal film was *Freaks* (1932). Do you recall when you first saw it?

CRONENBERG: I recall hearing about it for years and seeing stills from it. I suppose I finally saw it in college. Browning was a guy who went after that subject right down to the bone. I could never have made that movie. Part of the reason is that it leads into a social comment on aspects of freaks' existence and behavior, and that's not what I'm interested in.

TZ: Are you familiar with Leslie Fiedler's book *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self*?

CRONENBERG: Yes, certainly. In fact, I gave three books to Jeremy Irons when we started work. One was Leslie Fiedler's *Freaks*. One was *The Two*, a book about the Siamese twins, Eng and Chang. The third was Jeff Coates's *Principles of Gynecology* [laughs].

TZ: Speaking of which—Martin Scorsese once jokingly said that when he first met you, you reminded him of a "Beverly Hills gynecologist." And you played an obstetrician in *The Fly*. Isn't this getting a bit out of hand?

CRONENBERG: [Laughs.] Well, I've had this movie in the works even before I met Scorsese, so what can I say? I did,

however, turn down an offer to reprise my role in *The Fly II*. Chris Walas wanted me to deliver the new "Fly" baby.

TZ: One of the things you come away with after reading a book like Fiedler's or visiting the "lock-up" in a mental institution is that being human is really a marginal rather than an absolute condition.

CRONENBERG: Absolutely right. That's a theme in my work. I think that our definition of ourselves is so limited and so unreal, and the marginal nature of being human is one of the reasons I'm interested in freaks in the way that I am. It's exactly that: It forces us to step outside the narrow envelope we've made for ourselves.

TZ: Is that why your films are so full of monstrous births, horrible mutations, psychoses that become flesh...?

CRONENBERG: I think so. Yes.

TZ: Your press book describes that theme as biological horror. In the past, I've called it the cinema of pathology. Can you talk about how *Dead Ringers* explores it?

CRONENBERG: Well, I think it looks at something I've touched on before, which is the schism of mind and body, how they relate to each other. Also, each of my films might be described as my own little scientific experiment. I wouldn't say *Dead Ringers* is my "heredity versus environment" film, because I don't give my twins a different environment. It really becomes an experiment in human identity as perceived in very physical terms, as is usual with me. If two bodies are the same and the two minds are physically the same, and yet the two people are different, what does this lead us to? And why is it that these two need each other? Why do they form a kind of hermetically sealed unit?

TZ: The twin theme is one that's been explored in literature by writers like Borges, Dostoyevsky, Poe, Stevenson, and—one of your favorites—Nabokov.

CRONENBERG: But rarely in film, rarely seriously in film. TZ: But in film we have seen lots of twins and doubles: Ronald Colman in *The Prisoner of Zenda*, Louis Hayward in *The Man in the Iron Mask*, Bette Davis in *A Stolen Life* and *Dead Ringer*.

CRONENBERG: We have seen the "evil twin" theme and the broad comedies in which the twins are basically the same person. But I don't think the subject's been done realistically before—where you have twins who are very similar and yet subtly different. That's why this film was scary, especially for Jeremy Irons, because there's no schtick to rely on. It's very subtle.

TZ: In literature, the theme is usually used as a psychological metaphor, an expression of dislocation or alienation. Are you using it in that way?

CRONENBERG: Not really, and I actually avoided mirror imagery, for example, which is a staple of the approach you've described. Yes, the film is metaphorical, but it's more of an exploration of the twin phenomenon that Fiedler described in his book. Twins have a relationship which is so close and so inextricably intertwined that it reminds us of marriages and the link between parents and children, all those close relationships we have. It fascinates us and it's something we can understand. You don't have to be a twin to see what's happening to the two people in the film when their relationship becomes suffocating and unbearable and yet "unendable."

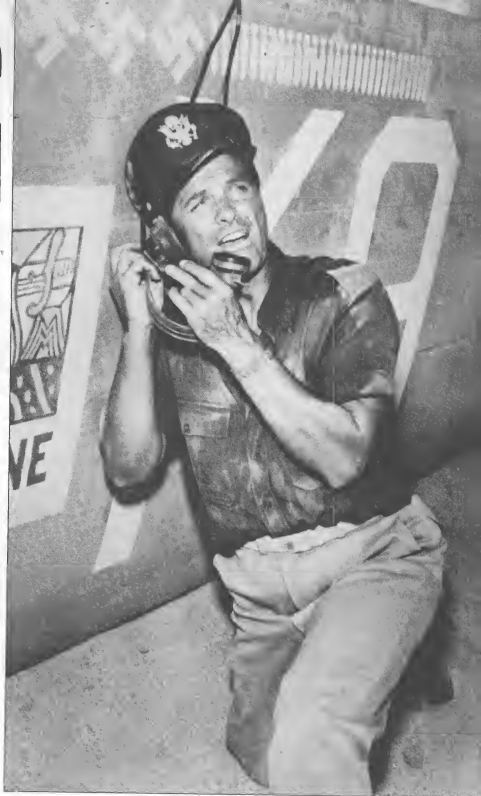
TZ: If we can switch to your background, I don't suppose there's a twin in your past?

CRONENBERG: No, just one sister, who's definitely not a twin.

TZ: Was your family religious? Some have detected a recurring theme of "original sin" in your work.

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KING NINE WILL NOT RETURN



TZ TELEPLAY
by
ROD SERLING

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On September 30, 1960, *The Twilight Zone* returned to the air for its second season with a haunting tale of a World War II bomber captain who finds himself alone in the North African desert. His plane, the King of Hearts, has crashed; his crew has vanished.

Acknowledged as one of Rod Serling's most powerful and effective *Twilight Zone* scripts, "King Nine Will Not Return" also featured an impressive performance by Robert Cummings, one of the most popular television actors of his day. As Hank Grant wrote in the *Hollywood Reporter*: "This was a *tour de force* for Cummings, an extremely difficult role that ran the gamut from relief to joy to panic to crazed hysteria—a performance that should merit serious consideration when Emmy time comes around."

The episode was based on an actual event; the rediscovery in May, 1959, of the *Lady Be Good*, an American B-24 bomber which went down in the Libyan desert in April, 1943. Though the plane was found intact, no trace of her crew was ever discovered.

Producer Buck Houghton
Director Buzz Kulik
Director of Photography George T. Clemens
Music Fred Steiner

CAST

Capt. James Embry Bob Cummings
Doctor Paul Lambert
Psychiatrist Gene Lyons
Nurse Jenna McMahon
British Officer Seymour Green
British Man Richard Lupino

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

1. EXTERIOR SKY NIGHT

Shot of the sky...the various nebulae and planet bodies stand out in sharp, sparkling relief. As the camera begins a slow pan across the heavens—

NARRATOR'S VOICE

There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow—between science and superstition. And it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call... *The Twilight Zone*.

The camera has begun to pan down until it passes the horizon and is flush on the opening shot with human eye changing into setting sun. PAN DOWN TO OPENING SCENE OF PLAY.

2. ANGLE SHOT EYE LEVEL A LARGE TABLE MAP

In the middle of an R.A.F. Ops room somewhere in Africa. Without seeing the people, we nonetheless do witness the markers coming in and out of the frame, pushing small chessmen-like figures back and forth across the board. Each represents a squadron or a wing of aircraft. Underneath are mumbled voices.

VOICES

Enemy has sixty-plus, midway between Bengazi and Tobruk.

Sapper control.

Group speaking. Raid fifty-one, forty-five plus, southeast of Malta.

Got it. It's all yours. One Squadron only. Scramble, Dog-Rose. Scramble, Dog-Rose! Vector zero ninety-five degrees. Angels tent.

Dog-Rose, Blue Leader. Sapper control speaking. Vector one thirty degrees. Twenty plus bandits, now Angels twelve. Buster!

These voices continue underneath. The markers move in and out across the board, pushing aircraft here, taking them away there. A tiny telescoped chess game of what is a massive life and death struggle that goes on above them across the skies. A phone rings. The difference of the sound exploding in sharp clarity. We see the arm and part of a peaked cap of an officer along with the telephone receiver in the corner of the frame.

OFFICER'S VOICE

Operations. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

(the phone is put down for a moment)

Yanks have an aircraft reporting heavy flak damage over Bari. Last heard from over Romadi and headed toward the desert. We've got a Mosquito group flying there. Have them keep their eye open.

MAN FROM TABLE

What kind of ship?

OFFICER'S VOICE

B-25 Mitchell. Designated as King Nine. (he picks up the receiver)

Hello, sir. We'll put out the call in case we hear anything. Yes, sir, that's right. Of course, if they're heading inland over the desert... the poor devils don't stand much chance!

He puts the receiver down. Now the CAMERA MOVES IN OVER THE TABLE to stare down at the little markers that move back and forth across the map.

DISSOLVE TO:

3. EXTERIOR DESERT PAN SHOT
ACROSS THE HORIZON DAY

We hear the Narrator's Voice.

NARRATOR'S VOICE

This is Africa, 1943. War spits out its violence overhead... and the sandy graveyard swallows it up.

At this point the CAMERA STOPS and we're looking at a fuselage of an aircraft half buried in the sand. PAN DOWN until we are on a TOP HAT SHOT only a few feet from the plane, close enough to see the ship in all its detail. A piece of fuselage (to be selected) swings back and forth in the desert wind, the creak of it providing the only sound in the otherwise incredible stillness of the place.

NARRATOR'S VOICE

Her name is King Nine... B-25, medium bomber, Twelfth Air Force. U.S.A.F. On a hot, still morning she took off to bomb the southern tip of Italy.

(a pause)

She did not return... on this day... or any other day... But like a resilient human being... she dies hard.

WHIP PAN OVER to a LONG SHOT of a sand dune. There, lying face down and slowly rising to his elbows, is a man.

FADE TO BLACK

OPENING BILLBOARD
FIRST COMMERCIAL

4. EXTERIOR DESERT DAY
MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT CAPTAIN EMBRY

He wears nondescript khaki with no military insignia. His face is grimed with sweat and oil on which sand clings. He slowly rises to his feet and stands there shakily, unsure of himself. He first looks toward the aircraft.

5. LONG SHOT THE PLANE
BURIED IN THE SAND

6. CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

As his eyes scan the horizon. PAN SHOT ACROSS THE

FADE IN:



DISTANT MOUNTAINS that stretch across the desert. The only sound underneath this is the sporadic wind and the creak of the piece of fuselage.

7. DIFFERENT ANGLE EMBRY

As he starts a slow walk over toward the plane. We hear his voice over as he walks.

EMBRY'S VOICE

I remember now... at least I remember parts of it. Wing tank hit, lost fuel all the way over. Fell behind. Went off course. Bellied in.

8. CLOSE SHOT OF HIM

As he reaches the plane, leans against the fuselage for a moment.

EMBRY'S VOICE

The crew. What about the crew? Did they bail out? Did I order them to bail out? (a pause)

No. No, I didn't. We all rode it in. All of us. Me.

(a pause)

Me. James Embry, Captain. That's who I am. Blake, co-pilot. Kransky, radio op. and waist gun. Jiminez, navigator. Connors... he was tail gunner. Kline... he was the upper turret gun. Let's see... who else... who else?

FADE TO:

9. INTERIOR AIRCRAFT

As Embry drops inside through upper turret door. Framed over his shoulder are the pilot's and copilot's seats, now empty. He moves into the small area, looks at the control panel, touches some of the instruments as if there were some clue to be found in their physical feeling.

10. PAN SHOT ACROSS THE CONTROL PANEL

Resting finally on an officer's slouch cap hanging on the stick. Embry picks this up and studies it. He looks in the inside of the cap.

11. EXTREMELY TIGHT INSERT

The letters "Blake, Gerald S., 1st Lt., U.S.A.F."

12. CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

As he studies this thoughtfully. He looks left and right and then suddenly calls out.

EMBRY

Blake?

(he shouts back toward tail)

Blake?

13. DIFFERENT ANGLE OF HIM

As he moves over to the radio operator's seat.

14. CLOSE SHOT EARPONES

They dangle by a wire and slowly oscillate back and forth in a wind that comes through a shattered window.

15. DIFFERENT ANGLE EMBRY

As he picks up the earphones, then runs a hand over the radio. He looks and calls out.

EMBRY

Jiminez? Hey, Jiminez?

16. ANGLE SHOT LOOKING DOWN

As Embry starts a slow walk through the length of the aircraft.

EMBRY

Kline? Conners? Kransky? Hey? Hey?

17. DIFFERENT ANGLE LOOKING DOWN AND ACROSS AT HIM

As he turns, looking toward the camera.

18. CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

As his eyes scan the plane.

19. PAN SHOT ACROSS THE SEATS

The unmanned guns, the radio, two parachutes that hang on hooks unused, a survival kit close by. Everything untouched. THE PAN SHOT CONTINUES in an arc until once again the shot is of Embry. He reaches up and fingers his face.

EMBRY'S VOICE (OVER)

Piece it together. That's what I have to do. Piece it all together.

(he wets his lips)

We bellied in... we bellied in and I must have been thrown clear of the plane. That's what must have happened. Knocked me cold. I may have been out for hours and the others, they—

He stops abruptly.

20. EXTREMELY TIGHT CLOSE SHOT HIS FACE

As suddenly an errant and delayed fear washes over it.

EMBRY'S VOICE

What about the others? Where are they? They didn't jump. The chutes are still here. And they're not dead. They couldn't be dead. And if they left the plane and started walking... why didn't they take me?

(again his eyes look left and right and around and he suddenly shouts.)

Blake? Kline? Conners?

(he stumbles forward toward the camera)

Jiminez? Kransky?

He stands there motionless now in the aftermath of silence, and suddenly, with a shocking intrusion, comes the sound of CW Morse code. He whirls around.

ABRUPT CUT TO:

21. RADIO

From it, like a dying, weak gasp, is the sound of a distant radio signal tapped out from some incredible distance away. He races over to the radio, grabs the earphones, puts one to his ear and listens with taut intensity. There's no sound. He wildly flicks a couple of switches, reaches for a hand mike.

EMBRY

Mayday, Mayday, this is King Nine calling Firefly. King Nine calling Firefly. Pancaked in desert. One hour thirty minutes from last checkpoint. Bearing two-ninety degrees. Area flat and sandy. Low hills to the north. No other distinguishing landmarks. No sign of crew. Mayday! Mayday! King Nine to Firefly. Come in please!

The CAMERA MOVES IN SLOWLY for an EXTREMELY TIGHT CLOSE SHOT as he listens and there is obviously no sound coming back at him. He slowly puts the hand mike down, looks briefly at the earphones, then turns again and looks down the length of the plane. The piece of fuselage swings lazily back and forth, the creak of it intruding once again on the silence. He turns, and once again walks back toward the cockpit.

22. DIFFERENT ANGLE

As he sits down in his pilot's seat. The CAMERA CIRCLES AROUND until it is facing him. We're looking at him through the cockpit glass, his features look strangely distorted in the light and shadow through the glass. Once again we hear his voice.

EMBRY'S VOICE

Easy now. Easy now. Think about it some. Don't go off half cocked. There are reasons. There are explanations. The crew is someplace for some reason, and I'm alone for some reason. Everything looks tilt... but there's logic behind it. There's logic for everything. I just have to... I just have to keep it cool. Think about it rationally. Don't panic, for the good Lord's sake... don't panic.

23. REVERSE ANGLE LOOKING OVER HIS SHOULDER

Through the windshield to the desert outside, that lies beyond the blunt front end of the aircraft.

EMBRY'S VOICE

(it has a different tone now, a different resolve)

The main thing... the main thing... and I've got to keep it in mind. I'm responsible for this crew. I'm in charge. As far as it's within my power... I've got to keep them alive. I command this aircraft and I'm in charge and I'm responsible. Blake, Kline. Jiminez. Conners... all of them. I'm responsible for them.

A silence that is suddenly broken by a metallic clunk outside.

24. DIFFERENT CLOSE-UP ANGLE

As Embry starts, jumps up from his seat, turns and starts back down the fuselage, shouting as he runs, colliding against the bulkhead, then recovering and continuing his wild dash through the plane. He turns, scrambles back.

EMBRY

(shouting)

Blake? Is that you? Is that you, Blake?

CUT TO:

25. EXTERIOR AIRCRAFT DESERT DAY

As Embry lifts himself through turret, drops, sprawls head-first in the sand, then looks up.

26. ANGLE SHOT LOOKING UP TOWARD TAIL OF PLANE EMBRY'S P.O.V.

Part of the tail assembly, damaged in the crash, has given way and parted from the plane to nose down into the sand. Embry gets to his feet, walks over to it, studies it and then touches it. Then he turns to study the length of the ship.

27. TRACK SHOT WITH HIM

As he walks alongside of it toward the nose, ducks under the wing, gets to the front of the plane, looks up through the cockpit window almost as if he were expecting to see someone.

28. DIFFERENT ANGLE OF HIM

As he turns, walks off toward the desert, reaches a sand dune and climbs up it, shields himself from a hot, blinding sun, then sweeps with his eyes across the barren, incredibly lonely landscape.

29. PAN SHOT ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

30. DIFFERENT ANGLE EMBRY

As he turns and is about to walk back toward the plane when his foot hits something.

31. FLASH CLOSE SHOT HIS FOOT

Alongside of it is an army canteen.

32. ANGLE SHOT LOOKING UP AT EMBRY

As he reacts excitedly. He reaches down and picks up the canteen, shakes it, listens to the sound of the water inside, turns it over wildly in his hand to stare down at the lettering on it.

33. EXTREMELY TIGHT CLOSE SHOT INSERT LETTERING ON CANTEEN

"Kline, Wm F., Tech. Sgt., U.S.A.F."

34. ANGLE SHOT LOOKING UP TOWARD EMBRY'S FACE

Silhouetted against the sky as he shouts again.

EMBRY

Kline? Sergeant Kline

(and then with laughter that

is more release than logic)

You incredibly stupid jerk—you dropped your canteen here! You stupid Bronx cowboy you! You're in the desert now, idiot. You're gonna need water!

35. DIFFERENT ANGLE

As he whirls around. The sweat now rolling down his face mixing with beard stubble and clinging sand, giving him a wild, frightened look.

EMBRY

I still got to nursemaid you, huh? This is some crew I've got here! They run around dropping canteens full of water—

36. DIFFERENT ANGLE

As he stops, closes his eyes, then slowly sinks down to his knees in the sand. His voice is much lower.

EMBRY

This is some crew. Some idiot crew.

Still on his knees, he raises his head and looks from left to right again, scanning the horizon. This time his shout is almost plaintive.

EMBRY

Blake? Jiminez? Kline? All right, you guys.

If it's a gag—if it's a gag knock it off. Hear me? Knock it off.

(now his head sinks low, in a soft voice, barely audible)

It's not funny, boys. It's strictly not funny.

37. TOP HAT CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

His face close to the sand now and bent over. His eyes open and very, very slowly he raises his head listening carefully, his features taut, motionless, not even a muscle moving. Gradually the face comes into camera, the eyes go open, the mouth starts to twitch, the features contort and then freeze. It's as if he were pulling down deep within himself to come out with a sound, an exclamation. And then it does come, one, long animal scream that bears no relationship to language. It's a naked exclamation of an emotion.

38. REVERSE ANGLE LOOKING TOWARD PLANE
Over Embry's shoulder. ZOOM INTO CLOSE SHOT OF THE COCKPIT as seen through the front glass. There in one pilot's seat sits the figure of a man; just part of his trunk and face visible. He stares out blankly.

39. REVERSE ANGLE LOOKING TOWARD EMBRY
Who gets wildly to his feet and then slipping, sliding, falling, rising, he races toward the plane, shouting.

EMBRY

(shouting)

Blake... Blake... Blake... it's Embry. It's me. It's Embry.

CUT TO:

40. INTERIOR PLANE

As Embry drops inside, stops at entrance to cockpit.

41. REVERSE ANGLE LOOKING TOWARD HIM
The two empty seats in the foreground. CAMERA MOVES IN VERY TIGHT on Embry's face.

EMBRY

(softly, out of breath)

Blake? Blake, where'd you go? What's the gag, Blake?

(then suddenly sobbing, burying his face against the bulkhead)

Come on, fellas. Come on... I'm responsible, don't you understand? I'm responsible for you guys.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK:

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

42. INTERIOR AIRCRAFT DAY
MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT EMBRY
Sitting in the pilot's seat, asleep. He wakes, gradually blinks his eyes, throws a startled look across at the copilot's seat,



which is empty, gets out of his seat, stands there for a moment thinking, then starts back through the plane, pauses by the radio set, reaches for the hand mike. Then he pushes the button, flicks a couple of switches, bangs at the radio with the flat of his hand, flicks another switch, then talks into the mike.

EMBRY

This is King Nine. King Nine calling Firefly. Mayday. Firefly. Mayday. Pancaked in desert. One hour and thirty minutes from last checkpoint—

Then he stops abruptly, closes his eyes, throws the mike down on the radio operator's table, takes out cigarettes from his shirt pocket, lights one.

43. DIFFERENT ANGLE CLOSE-UP EMBRY
As he looks around the plane again.

44. PAN SHOT DOWN THE PLANE

Across the bulkhead, taking in the chutes, the survival kits and everything. A flight jacket of one of the crew members. A flak helmet lying on its side.

CUT BACK TO:

- 44[A]. EMBRY
Who smiles grimly.

EMBRY'S VOICE

Hallucinations. The whole thing could be a hallucination. I could be lying out there in the sand with a fractured skull. I might not even be in here. I might be dying out there in the desert. All of this is what I'm manufacturing in my mind. Or maybe I'm sleeping and I'm having a dream. Maybe I'll wake up and I'll be back at the base. Or

maybe I tied one on and I'm in a booth in a bar someplace with a girl.

(then he shakes his head again and grins a crooked, lopsided, mirthless grin)

Oh...this one tears it! This one really tears it! When the medics get ahold of me, they'll never let loose. They'll put me on tour. If they ever let me out of the bin, that is.

Then he turns and looks back to the open door of the cockpit.

45. LONG SHOT OVER HIS SHOULDER
OF COCKPIT OPENING

At the two seats, empty.

46. REVERSE ANGLE LOOKING TOWARD EMBRY
The smile fades.

EMBRY

I saw him. I saw Blake sitting here....

That was no hallucination.

(then his voice rises)

I saw him. Nobody can tell me any different! I saw Blake sitting here.

He points toward the cockpit. Then he looks around again, a directionless, halfhearted look, knowing deep inside that he'll see nothing and find nothing and hear nothing, but he looks nonetheless, because the inventory of actions is completely limited now. He calls out again.

EMBRY

Blake? How about it, crew? Any of you hear me? Jiminez? Kline?

Then he stops, obviously conscious of being totally ineffectual; of accomplishing nothing. Once again he heads toward the turret and gets out.

CUT TO:

47. EXTERIOR DESERT DAY
MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

As he stands there, looks around the horizon, then up toward the sky.

48. TRACK SHOT WITH HIM

As he walks back toward the dune. He stops and picks up the canteen, unscrews it and takes a drink. Then he screws it on tight again. Once again he looks out over the horizon and, holding onto the canteen, he starts off in a direction away from the plane, looking left and right, stumbling knee-deep in sand, half falling, then straightening up and continuing.

49. REVERSE ANGLE

As he heads toward camera. He wipes the sweat off his face with his arm and continues on until he is framed big in the picture. He stops, shouts.

EMBRY

Hey! King Nine crew! This is your captain here! How about it, you guys? I'm responsible for you jerks and you're giving me some bum action here. You're throwing curves, gentlemen.

(then much more softly, much more reflectively)

How about it, crew? How about it, team? Come home to papa. I've got to look after you guys.

He suddenly whirls around to look back toward the plane.

50. CLOSE SHOT

THE GLASS OVER THE FRONT COCKPIT

Inside are the bare outlines of two empty chairs with no one sitting in them.

51. DIFFERENT ANGLE

As he turns back toward camera.

EMBRY

(softly)

How about a clue here? How about an omen?

(looking up toward the sky)

How about a portent from Heaven?

(then loud)

Something! Anything!

(his voice cracks again and

he shouts)

Something! Anything! Blake. Jiminez.

Kline. Conners. Please, fellahs. Please.

Where are you guys?

52. DIFFERENT ANGLE OF HIM

As once again he turns and walks back to the plane.

53. MOVING SHOT WITH HIM

As he walks. We hear his voice again.

EMBRY'S VOICE

Got to keep the wits! Got to think clearly now. Relate. Piece together. Remember.

EMBRY

I am Captain Robert Embry. I fly a B-25. It's called King Nine. It crash-landed in the desert because I ran out of fuel.

EMBRY'S VOICE

(he reaches the plane and stops, stands motionless, then his nervous fingers touch and then drum on his face)

Robert Embry. I'm twenty-four. I took pre-flight at Amarillo. I took multiple engine at Randolph. We went to England...and

then to Africa. And we're based in...we're based in Tunisia and we were on a milk run to Southern Italy and we caught some stray flak there then we ran out of fuel and I got the poor devils off course. It was my fault.

EMBRY

Well, that one I've got down! There's no question there. It was my fault.

EMBRY'S VOICE

(he taps at his dusty shirt, then

lets his gaze finally rest on

the aircraft buried in the sand)

Well, you're responsible for the ship and for the men. Now, Embry, you've got to pick up the dice. And you've got to throw. Six the point.

(a pause)

Six crew members. They're in your pocket, Embry.

EMBRY

That's right, they're in my pocket.

(then with a sob that wells

up in his throat he shakes his

head back and forth)

But where are they? Where'd you all go?

(then screaming)

Hey! Hey, fellahs! No more hide and seek!

Let's come home to papa now. I'm responsible!

(then suddenly crying, his head

down, buried in his chest)

Oh, God...oh, dear God...I'm responsible.

54. EXTREMELY TIGHT CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

We cut to him. At the identical moment we suddenly hear a loud metallic clank coming from over the dunes. Embry holds his breath, listening and once again we hear the sound.

55. LONG ANGLE SHOT LOOKING DOWN AT EMBRY

As he races back toward the dune.

56. DIFFERENT ANGLE OF HIM

As he runs.

CUT TO:

57. CLOSE-UP OF HIM

As he runs into the camera, stops, looks down at something that cuts his breath off. The CAMERA SLOWLY PANS AWAY from his face down to the ground. There is a crude cross made out of a piece of metal and a piece of wood from the structure. Hanging on it is a flak helmet that bangs against one of the metal pieces in the wind.

58. DIFFERENT ANGLE

As Embry drops to his knees, tilts his head so that he can read the inscription on the wood.

59. EXTREMELY TIGHT CLOSE SHOT INSCRIPTION

Inscribed with laborious lettering it reads: "Tech. Sgt. Wm. F. Kline died of wounds received in crash, April 5, 1943. Rest in peace, buddy. The crew."

60. CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

As he shakes his head back and forth, his voice soft and gentle.



EMBRY

Oh, Kline... I'm sorry. I didn't know, you see. I had no idea—

(then a pause)

Rest in peace, Kline. Rest in peace, kid.

61. DIFFERENT ANGLE PROFILE SHOT OF HIM

As suddenly a droning sound is heard from far off. It gradually grows louder and louder and seems to fill the whole sky. Embry's head slowly rises until he's staring up toward the sky.

CUT TO:

62. SKY THREE JETS

With swept-back wings streak across, leaving long vapor trails behind them.

CUT TO:

63. CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

As he reacts.

EMBRY'S VOICE

What kind of aircraft are those? Wait a minute here... what kind of planes? What are they? I've never seen any planes like that before. I've never seen any jets—
(he stops abruptly, turning toward camera)

Jets. Jet aircraft. How did I know about jet aircraft. It's 1943. There's no such thing as jet aircraft. Not yet. But I know about them. I know about jet aircraft. F-106's. F-105's. B-58's. I know all about them.

(then shutting his eyes tight, clawing at his face as if trying to find an entrance into a reality)

What's going on here? Where am I? When am I?

(then shaking his head back and forth)

EMBRY

Wait a minute. Hold it. Stop everything. I'm Captain Robert Embry. I'm the pilot of that bomber over there. It's a B-25. We went to Italy this morning. It's World War II. Hey! Hey!

64. LONG SHOT THE SKY

As the jets disappear.

65. ANGLE SHOT LOOKING DOWN AT EMBRY

Who looks up toward the sky. He screams after the departing planes.

EMBRY

Where you guys from? What's going on here? What are you doing here?

Then he stops, puts his head down, runs a hand over his closed eyes and just stands there motionless.

66. DIFFERENT ANGLE

As he turns and starts to walk back toward the plane.

67-69. DIFFERENT SHOTS

His walk to the plane. He reaches the nose, stops and looks up toward the cockpit window again. He calls out.

EMBRY

Blake? Lieutenant Blake? Ever hear of a jet

aircraft? Ever hear of an F-106? An F-105? A B-58?

(then screaming with no holds barred)

Hey, crew! We've got to get out of here!
(then repeating)

We've got to get out of here!

70. DIFFERENT ANGLE

As seen through the propeller blade that protrudes from the sand. Embry goes over to it, touches it, moves his hand up and down.

We're not going to be able to walk out, that's for sure. That's for positive. We can't walk out. We're going to have to fly.

(then looking wildly left and right)

Come on back. Crew, come on back! We'll have to prop up the ship. We'll have to get the wheels down. We'll try to take off. I'll get her back up, boys. You can trust me. I'll get her back up.

He grabs the prop, wrestles with it and, with some kind of inhuman effort, tries to move it. This goes on for several moments, the sweat pouring from his face, his clothes sopping with it. Then he stops, steps away, looks at the propeller and he starts to laugh, a growing laugh, a baseless, indeterminate, totally illogical laugh and it then continues half wild, half meaningless, half nonsensical. He shakes his head back and forth, staring at the propeller.

EMBRY

It doesn't make any difference! You're an illusion! You don't even exist. Either I'm dead or out of my mind, or I'm off in limbo someplace. I'm unconscious. I'm sick. I'm cracked up in an army ward or I'm down in the drink someplace drowning, or I don't even exist any more than you do. Hey, crew! Hey, team! You can break the silence now. You can yell at me. You can spring up out of the sand. You can—

71. CLOSE SHOT HIS FACE

As suddenly he stops. The silence now envelopes him and after a moment the thin howl of the wind is focalized like some kind of a ghostly orchestra prefacing a new act in his nightmare. He slowly turns and stares off in the distance to a sand dune and then reacts.

72-76. SERIES OF FLASH CUTS TO CLOSE-UPS

Of each member of the crew. Kransky, Conners, Blake, Jimenez and a young sergeant with an ugly looking gash across his forehead. Embry's voice screams out each name as the camera cuts from one to the other. And when the camera hits Kline, we

CUT ABRUPTLY TO:

77. EXTREMELY TIGHT CLOSE SHOT

EMBRY'S DISTORTED FACE

As he screams out.

EMBRY

(screaming)

Kline!

78. ANGLE SHOT LOOKING DOWN ON EMBRY

As he races toward the sand dune.

79. LOW ANGLE SHOT

LOOKING UP TOWARD LINE OF MEN

Representing the crew, as they stand there stoically, emotionlessly, watching the approaching pilot scramble toward them.

80. REVERSE ANGLE LOOKING TOWARD EMBRY

As he races toward camera and then stops, his eyes traversing left to right.

81. TOP OF THE SAND DUNE EMBRY'S P.O.V.

PAN SHOT across the empty stretch of sand. There's no one there.

82. CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

As he slowly sinks to his knees in the sand.

EMBRY

They're phantoms. Everything is a phantom. There isn't a thing...not a single thing that's real.

He suddenly looks down at the sand that he clutches in his palm and shakes his head back and forth. He topples forward and then lies on his back staring up into the sky.

EMBRY

Oh, God...Oh, God. You got to tell me what's happening here. You got to tell me what's happening!

His voice is like some kind of ritual drone, like a chant, like a dirge, and it continues as the CAMERA PANS SLOWLY DOWN to his hand which clutches at the impassive sand underneath him.

SLOW LAP DISSOLVE TO:

83. INTERIOR DIMLY LIT HOSPITAL ROOM

DAY CLOSE SHOT EMBRY'S HAND

As it grips the sheets that cover him. CAMERA PULLS BACK for FULL SHOT OF THE ROOM. We see Embry in profile lying in a hospital bed. Beyond him and close to the door are a white-coated hospital staff doctor and a psychiatrist who now converse in low tones.

PSYCHIATRIST

This the man? Embry? That his name?

DOCTOR

(holds up clipboard)

Robert Embry. Age forty-one. Single. It happened this morning. He went by a newsstand, looked at a paper, then went into shock. When the ambulance got there he was almost catatonic.

84. CLOSE SHOT PSYCHIATRIST

As his eyes scan the bed and then stop at the foot of it.

85. CLOSE SHOT FOOT OF BED

A newspaper is spread out, its front page visible.

86. CLOSE SHOT INSERT FRONT PAGE

A headline reads, "WORLD WAR II BOMBER FOUND INTACT IN DESERT." Then underneath it, in slightly smaller print, "B-25 Mitchell lies 17 years in desert. No clue as to whereabouts of crew."

87. TWO SHOT DOCTOR AND PSYCHIATRIST

PSYCHIATRIST

That's what set it off? That front page?

DOCTOR

(nods)

That's why I thought we ought to have a

psychiatrist in on it.

PSYCHIATRIST

Odd.

DOCTOR

(shaking his head)

I thought so, too. So I spent the whole day digging into this fellow's background. I checked with the Pentagon in Washington.

(he looks down at his clipboard again and takes facts from it)

Captain. Air Force. Flew a B-25. Africa and Italy. Thirty-seven missions. Discharged, August, 1943. Recurrent fevers...

(then looking up from board, his voice meaningful)

Some suggestion of a psychological disturbance. But he was discharged before they could find out much about it. It was all brought out in his squadron M.O.'s report just before his discharge.

88. DIFFERENT ANGLE

As the psychiatrist walks over to the bed, looks down to Embry, then across the bed to the picture of the aircraft in the newspaper, then over his shoulder toward the doctor.

PSYCHIATRIST

(pointing to the paper)

This was his plane?

DOCTOR

His plane and his crew. They took off for Italy on what was supposed to be a milk run.

(then very meaningfully)

But Embry never went on that last mission. He reported in ill and someone else flew the plane for him. It never got back.

89. CLOSE SHOT PSYCHIATRIST

As he reacts.

PSYCHIATRIST

And for seventeen years he's carried that in his gut.

DOCTOR

(walking quietly over to stand alongside)

Not so deep that when he saw the picture of his plane on the front page...he was able to keep himself from letting out one scream...and then going into shock.

PSYCHIATRIST

(shakes his head, rubs his jaw with the back of his hand)

The infinitely fragile balance of the mind...

and we never know how fragile it is!

(he looks down closely at the newspaper and then picks it up, thoughtfully)

The King of Hearts.

At this moment Embry stirs. The two men go over to him.

90. CLOSE SHOT EMBRY

As he wets his lips, opens his eyes. They flutter for a moment then open completely.



91. ANGLE SHOT LOOKING UP TOWARD THE TWO DOCTORS' FACES EMBRY'S P.O.V.
First they are out of focus and then gradually take on clarity.

92. REVERSE ANGLE EMBRY DOCTORS' P.O.V.
DOCTOR
You're all right, Mr. Embry. You're in a hospital. We'll look after you.

93. GROUP SHOT
Embry visible in the middle.

EMBRY
(his voice weak)
Crazy dream. Crazy dream. I went back... I went back to the desert.

DOCTOR
That's all right, Mr. Embry—
PSYCHIATRIST
(interrupting and touching the doctor's arm)
Go ahead, Mr. Embry. You went back and then what?

EMBRY
(continuing weakly)
Went back to the ship. Tried to find the guys. Looked for them. Looked all over. Thought I saw Blake, but it was a mirage. An illusion. He wasn't there. None of them were there.

DOCTOR
(softly)
It was an illusion, Mr. Embry. But you're out of it now. You're all right again.

EMBRY
I should have been on the plane. I should have gone on that mission. I fucked out—
PSYCHIATRIST
You didn't fuck out. And you had no way of knowing that that plane would never come back. But you'll realize that as time goes on now. And you'll feel better for it, Mr. Embry. It's out in the open now. You

don't have to hide it in a pit deep inside you. That's what's been hurting all these years.

94. CLOSE SHOT EMBRY
He only grasps the sense of the doctor's words.

EMBRY
(remembering suddenly)
Kline. I found Kline's grave. He was killed in the crash. But then I saw him. And I saw the others too. The whole crew.
(he shakes his head again, and closes his eyes)

Another crazy thing... another dream... another illusion, whatever it was. I was standing by the plane and I looked up... and there were jet planes overhead. Isn't that wild? 1943, African desert... and up above were jet planes. Just as if... just as if I'd gone back there today—
(he stops abruptly, very, very softly)

Did I? Did I go back? Did I go back to the plane?

PSYCHIATRIST
(very softly)
In your mind only, Mr. Embry. That's how you went back. In your mind.
(then very gently)

Go back to sleep now. You're going to be all right.

He motions to the doctor and the two men walk out of the room.

95. INTERIOR HOSPITAL CORRIDOR DAY
TWO SHOT THE TWO DOCTORS

As they come out. They walk over to a bench against a far wall. On it is an identical newspaper with the headline visible. The psychiatrist looks at it briefly. He lights a cigarette and gives one to the doctor.

PSYCHIATRIST
I'd like to start talking to him in a day or so. I think the worst part of it's over. The guilt's out in the open and he knows what it is.
DOCTOR

And the illusion? The dream?
PSYCHIATRIST
(shrugs)
Right now it's real... In a few days, in a week or two... it'll lose all of its reality.

96. MEDIUM CLOSE SHOT NURSE
As she approaches from down the corridor. She carries Embry's clothes in a pile, his shoes on top of them. The nurse looks briefly at the doctor then to the door.

NURSE
Is that Mr. Embry's room, Doctor?
DOCTOR
That's right.
NURSE
These are his clothes. They were left in the examination room.
DOCTOR
Put them on the bench there, nurse. I'll be

TZ TELEPLAY

going back in the room. I'll take them in.
The nurse lays the clothes down on the bench.

97. CLOSE SHOT THE BENCH
As they're put down alongside the paper.

98. CLOSE SHOT THE NURSE
As she smiles at the Doctor and is about to turn when suddenly something catches her attention on the bench.

99. CLOSE SHOT BUNDLE OF CLOTHES
One of the shoes is tipped over. From it pours a thin funnel of sand that lands on the front page.



100. CLOSE SHOT NURSE
Reacting.

NURSE
What's that?

101. DIFFERENT ANGLE PSYCHIATRIST
As he picks up the shoe, reaches inside and takes out a handful of sand which he holds out in his palm, and then pours into the doctor's hand.

PSYCHIATRIST
It's sand.

NURSE
Sand? Now where do you suppose that came from?

102. TWO SHOT THE TWO DOCTORS
As they look at one another.

103. TRACK SHOT PSYCHIATRIST
As he leaves the group and walks over to the door of Embry's room, opens it partially to stare inside. Over his shoulder we can see Embry lying in bed in the semi-dark room.

PSYCHIATRIST
(softly)
I wish I knew.
DOCTOR
(walking up to stand close to his elbow, in almost a whisper)

Where do you suppose it's from?
PSYCHIATRIST
(looks at him)
I suppose it's from Jones Beach or the seashore or from a fishing trip he took a week or so ago. Or—

DOCTOR
Or?

104. INTERIOR EMBRY'S ROOM
As the two men re-enter and stand over him.

DOCTOR
(repeats)
Or? Where else could it come from?
PSYCHIATRIST
(very gently)
Or it could come from a desert. From a plane.

He looks toward the newspaper.

105. CLOSE SHOT INSERT FRONT PAGE
Picture of plane.

106. REVERSE ANGLE LOOKING OVER THE BED TOWARD THE TWO MEN
Embry in the foreground.

PSYCHIATRIST
From a Flying Fortress called The King of Hearts.
He looks briefly at the doctor, looks down at the floor, very, very thoughtfully, then shakes his head, turns and walks out of the room. The doctor leans over Embry.

DOCTOR
Rest easy, Mr. Embry.

(a pause)
Captain Embry. You've had a long journey back. Very long. Now you can rest.
He looks down at his now open palm, raises it and lets the sand trickle down to an ashtray on the bed table. CAMERA PANS OVER for an EXTREMELY TIGHT CLOSE SHOT OF THE SAND coming out of his hand.

LAP DISSOLVE TO:
107. EXTERIOR DESERT CLOSE SHOT WING TIP

Wind blows a funnel of sand off of it so that it falls in much the same pattern as we've seen it in the doctor's hand.

NARRATOR'S VOICE
Enigma buried in the sand. A question mark with broken wings that lies in silent grace as a marker in a desert shrine.
Now the CAMERA STARTS TO PULL BACK until it is on a LONG ANGLE SHOT looking down at the plane, half buried in the sand.

NARRATOR'S VOICE
Odd how the real consorts with the shadows; how the present fuses with the past.
(a pause)

How does it happen? The question is on file in the silent desert...and the answer...the answer is waiting for us...in The Twilight Zone.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.

"You might not get off that easy, you know," he said, very slowly. "You might not get to pass blissfully in your sleep. You might just wind up in Riverdale ICU with a tube up your nose, blinking once for yes and twice for no."

Kane stood, surveying the wreckage. Another stray clot had been inspired to fire down that tube and lodge in some dark fissure of the brain. It had happened in his sleep; he woke up, got up, went to the bathroom, and fell over.

Boom.

Kane heard about it fifteen hours later. He drove all night, coming down from the rustic little cabin in upstate New York where he'd holed himself up to work on his new book. The whole way down, his thoughts drifted back to that long-ago conversation. The whole way down, one thought kept repeating, over and over again: "Nice try, Dad."

Nice try.

STROKE NUMBER THREE HAD FOLLOWED IN short order, within hours of his admission. It sent him into a medically mystifying stupor; they simply couldn't keep him awake. For two days, he drifted in and out of consciousness.

On the third day he rose, miraculously reawakened, weak but lucid. The first thing he asked Kane for were his cigarettes.

By mid-afternoon the D.T.s kicked in. And the black snow came.

It fell for four days, a bleary-eyed wash of delirium and sedatives, needles and tubes and canvas restraints. Kane slept very little, poised on the death-watch while his father took many strange journeys.

By the morning of the fifth day, the D.T.s had passed. By the afternoon of the fifth day his system had an adverse reaction to the sedatives, and he went to sleep again.

Two days later he awoke, coughing horribly. Seven days on his back had produced a spectacular case of hospital pneumonia. Again modern medicine came to the rescue, with bronchial dilators and ever more tubes and needles and pills.

And he just got weaker and weaker; inch by inch, closer.

To the deadline.

KANE HAD BEEN FOREWARNED ABOUT THE paralysis, and the bilateral swelling of the brain, and the dozen-odd other biological disasters that had transpired. They were all dire, all terrifying.

But they all paled, next to the look in his father's eyes.

The uncertainty was the worst. In

**The gaze he
turned back to
Kane was that
of an ancient,
frightened child,
encased in a
prison of uncom-
prehending and
dying flesh.**

a bad movie Kane might somehow know, just by looking at him. Real sad violins and cellos in the background, swelling with passion at that moment of contact.

Real life didn't work that way. Six inches from his father's gristled, swollen face, holding the claw of his frozen left hand and staring into those eyes with only the hiss and burble of medical machinery for accompaniment, Kane couldn't tell if his father even knew who he was.

Worse still was to consider that Dad might indeed know, and want to react, but not be able to, betrayed and imprisoned by a conspiracy of blood and brain and bad habits.

Outside, Kane appeared calm. Inside, he felt numb. He was aware of the presence of feelings, in a kind of cold, abstract way. He watched the synapses fly from a great distance, even heard exact replicas of emotional reactions coming out of his very own mouth. But he didn't really feel attached to them.

Not that there was any shortage of emotional grist: Guilt, anger. Remorse. Rage.

Pointless rage: at his father for courting misery and death, at his mother for aiding and abetting the cause, at both of them for not having the guts to work it out or the balls to call it quits; at God Almighty, author of this mad

melodrama and architect of Original Obsolescence, the only One who would deign to build creatures so terrifyingly fragile that a lifetime of knowledge and experience could be wiped instantly from the face of the earth by a lump of cholesterol no bigger than a god-damned booger, for chrissakes, an insignificant speck of matter hurtling through an infinitesimally small space to run amok amid even more perilously delicate matter.

"Do you know who I am?" Kane stared at his father's eyes. "Can you say my name?"

Nothing. The eyes stared at him, registering awareness but no emotion. They did not track any movement; six inches to either side and his father was staring blankly at the ceiling. Kane tried to center himself, tried to meet the gaze.

Finally, he did. Those blue, frozen orbs locked on his.

And Kane gazed into the abyss.

His mother and sister were talking to the doctor; it was all a burble of incomprehensible modulating tones, coming from some distant galaxy. Kane gazed into the abyss.

The abyss, through his father's eyes, gazed back.

It held for thirty seconds, give or take a lifetime. Then the old man's gaze just drifted away, toward some distant inner space, and he was gone again.

No one noticed as Kane walked out into the corridor, and kept on walking. He found the bathroom with the urgency and aplomb of someone about to be violently ill. He entered quietly. Locked the door.

And cried. Until the tears wouldn't come anymore.

"I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOUR FATHER'S last wishes."

Kane sat across from his mother in the hospital cafeteria, a congealed lump of tuna fish salad sitting untouched before him. A glass of iced tea that tasted like runoff from a Jersey chemical spill sat next to it. He wanted the food about as much as he wanted to hear his mother's next words, which was not very. But like the food, he figured he'd better take it all in. So he ate. And listened.

"He always said he wanted to be cremated and have his ashes scattered at sea," she said. "So I've decided that, when he dies, I'm going to take a cruise and do just that."

She nodded her head, in complete agreement with herself. The absurdly mercenary logic of her survival instinct was genuinely impressive. Kane looked

DEADLINES

at her flatly, trying not to react. It wasn't too hard; he felt as if his heart had scabbed over damned near completely. *Bon voyage*, he thought. *What a great way to start fresh: no plot to keep weeded, no urn to clutter up the mantelpiece, no unpleasant reminders. Just anchors awaigh as we sail into the sunset. . . .*

"Good plan, Mom," Kane mumbled. *Maybe I can bribe the mortician to save a bone hunk for me.*

"Don't feel bad about your father," she said, by way of comfort. "He chose to do things this way."

Kane nodded. *Yeah, he thought. That's very true. He did choose this fate.*

But he had help. . . .

IT WAS SO PERVERSE. THERE CAME A POINT where it was possible to see one's parents, not from a child's point of view, but more as peers: people who grew up, grew older, made decisions, made choices.

Made mistakes.

Had they ever really loved each other? He didn't know. Maybe they didn't even know. They must have, once upon a time, when they were young and nothing in the world was beyond the grasp of their imaginations. They had it together for a while, anyway; Kane had memories of a happy, stable childhood.

And then something clicked, like a forgotten landmine waiting years for that one misplaced step.

Kane's father had given him some scraps of information, from time to time. Others he had gleaned from his mother, or his sister. But piecing together the story of his parents' lives made Kane feel like an archaeologist deciphering the cuneiforms of a lost civilization. Fragments surfaced. Most were probably lost to him forever.

It was during the heady last days of the Big War. He was a lieutenant in the Navy: handsome and cocky, fighting the good fight with the world by the balls. She was a model and a nightclub singer: a flighty, pretty girl with great gams and a gold digger's streak. She'd married him less for love than for security, thinking him to be better off than he was; at best, she very likely loved him a whole lot less than he loved her. Kane couldn't really bash her for climbing—from what he knew she'd grown up working-class poor, abandoned by her natural parents and raised by relatives—but he always thought if she'd wanted to be *nouvelle riche* she should have done more thorough research.

She accepted her fate like a trooper, and their years together ran the middle-class gamut of the post-war years. They begat their fair share of the baby-boom—Karen, Kevin and Kane—and juggled kids and careers in a kind of all-American ascendancy. He studied and eventually went on to become a university professor; not a lot of money but it had a certain class, and it was something he believed in passionately.

She gave up performing but eventually discovered a talent for art, and went on to become a sculptor. Their social life burgeoned as they worked their way into a lively local art scene, with lots of friends, lots of shows and awards and parties galore.

And then somewhere along the way they lost their footing. The parties got wilder. The drinking got harder. Make no mistake; they both drank. But there was a difference, a line crossed, made clearer by the passage of time. Mother had a drinking problem. Dad was an alcoholic. Dad lost his tenure at the university, some terrible scandal the kids weren't let in on.

Kane never did find out what that was; another fragment lost in the great excavation. All he knew was that when he was fourteen they moved to a bo-hunk cow town ten years behind the times. Dad had secured a position at a smaller, infinitely less prestigious col-

lege in a distant state, uprooted the family, vaporized the art shows, the parties, the social whirl.

She never forgave him.

They hobbled through the changes, growing ever more depressed and alienated from themselves and each other. He ultimately quit teaching altogether, no longer able to breathe fire into complacent, indifferent students, no longer able to see any reason why he should care. The world was going to hell in a handbasket, and he just didn't give a shit.

Kane grew away from them; searching for his own life, determined to define it on his own terms. He was their baby, the youngest. When he left, the remnants of the nest went with him.

Middle age, when it came, found each of his parents blaming the other for their own unhappiness, until their union ultimately degenerated into a bloody war of attrition, where they punished each other for the things they should have done by denying each other the things each needed most.

She had always wanted security. He had failed to provide her that. So she punished him, by denying him: her affection, his self-esteem. He punished her back, and himself in the bargain, by ceasing to care: about his life, about his health, about much of anything.

And he started the serious drinking.

Not the falling-down drunk kind; at least, not until much later. No, his was the brand that happened slowly, insidiously; a disconnecting process so gradual that you might not even see the change if you didn't know the man. In the mornings, there'd be the semblance of the father Kane remembered: soft-spoken, though tired. A gentle and intelligent man.

By afternoon, invariably, the torture had resumed. The voice raised. The temper flared. Everything became an irritant: the dog, the house, his wife, his job, his world.

Life itself.

Life irritated him from early afternoon through late evening, and on into the dead of night after night after night.

And after a while, it never stopped at all.

Still, they clung to the marriage: working at cross-purposes, antagonizing each other, racking up the years like points on some imaginary scorecard. *We might be miserable, but we've been together three decades and that counts for something, goddamnit!*

Eventually, she couldn't imagine a scenario in which she actually felt like she loved him again. She needed him, yes, indeed. In ways that she couldn't

**Kane sat down
at his Smith-
Corona and fed in
a sheet of paper.
He had to get to
work; the chore
of cannibalizing
his experience
for posterity
beckoned.**

see, which would become very apparent when he was gone. But she couldn't let that through. She was marking time, she said, waiting for him to die so that she could get on with her life, afraid that if they split up now what little insurance he had would end up in the hands of some twenty-year-old chippie. He was actually worth more dead to her than alive.

Eventually, she said it so often that she came to believe it.

Kane couldn't fathom why his father even remained in the game. Probably because he loved her still, beneath it all. And he needed—desperately, more than he could say—to be loved. By her.

But he had maneuvered himself into a lose-lose situation: the more he drank, the less he cared. The less he cared, the worse it got. The worse it got, the more she harped. The more she harped, the less she could ever hope to express her love for him. The less she loved, the more he drank. The more he drank...

And on. And on. It was a downward spiraling vortex, a doomed duet, with death at his heart.

Hiss.

YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO BE UNDERSTANDING; yeah, sure. You were supposed to forgive, to remember that we're only human, after all, that each of us has their faults and their shortcomings. Like the saying went, "If you love someone, you don't expect too much of them."

"Fuckin' aye," Kane muttered, bringing the axe down with all his strength. Wood cracked like a rifle shot in the cold night air. *Don't expect too much of them.* Right. Tell it to the worms. Tell it to the fucking carpet beetles. Kane saw it differently.

The exact inverse, in fact. If you love someone, you expect an awful fucking lot. More than from anyone else on earth. If you loved someone, you couldn't help but let them in, close to the soft, beating mass of your heart. It was an inescapable risk. You let them in and hoped that they didn't hurt you. You hoped that, if they couldn't find it in themselves to live for their own sake, maybe they could get it up for the sake of those they loved. You hoped that there'd be enough time for everyone to work it out.

No matter what they did, no matter how often they did it, you held out Hope.

As the deathwatch ticked, toward its inevitable end.

You held out Hope.

Till the end of the line.

You held out.

Until sometimes you just couldn't hold it anymore, until you were burned and burned and burned past all hope of recognition. Until something inside you one day snapped....

Kane gathered up the load in his arms to carry into the cabin. Inside, he laid the damp wood down on the hearth, laid a fire in the fireplace and coaxed it to light. Then he sat down at the table that held his Smith-Corona and fed in a clean sheet of paper. He had to get back to work; the chore of cannibalizing his experience for posterity beckoned.

There was a small bone-dry aquarium amid the clutter of the tabletop, with a string of colorful postcards propped up against its glass wall. They were all from tropical ports of call in the Caribbean, all postmarked recently, all signed *having a lovely time wish you could see this love mother*. Lots of beautiful sunsets. Kane stared at their colorful cavalcade for a moment, and wrote:

I see the deadlines in my father's face. They grow deeper every day: prominent in the harsh winter light; drawn from the hollow sockets of his eyes, sketched in papyrus skin, and sadness, and time. Too much time.

Too little time.

I see the walls of his prison. I see the boundary, and the debt to be paid. Though we are close enough to touch, there is no contact. It is as though he has been sealed away, locked in a hell the depths of which I cannot fathom. We look, but do not touch.

For a long time I wanted only to tear down the walls, to smash those fuckers into dust. I wanted to pull him back from the edge he seemed so determined to cross.

Now, I welcome his departure. I celebrate his passing from this evil of sorrow, that he may join the all-consuming light, embrace his karmic destiny, reflect upon his travails in the sweet repose of eternal Night. I welcome his departure, that I can better get on with the process of honoring his memory.

Kane paused.

So that I can better deny the spark of him that lies buried within his son.

There was a small pile of wood shavings filling the aquarium's center.

Nestled on the shavings was a skull. Carpet beetles crawled across its cracks and crevices, diligently cleaning the surface. Its hair was an ash-white nest of snakes rimming the dome of the skull, the movement of many tiny bodies making the individual strands rustle in the perfectly still air of the tank. They'd been at it for a long time now.

They were almost done.

I catch a glimpse of it every now and again; in a cough or a gesture, some nuance or tone of voice. I see my reflection out of the corner of my eye and it's him, an updated version of the beaten-down man with the sad blue eyes.

And it frightens me.

Because there's a mad rhythm to this, palpable as the *tiktiktik* of shoes down a hospital corridor, as the clock that runs down a life that lasts too long and ends too soon; a mad logic that says: if we are the younger versions of our parents, are they not older versions of ourselves? Are we as much a product of their struggle as their blood? Are we also doomed to roll over, to murder our dreams one day at a time, to endlessly replicate the sad patterns of this pathetic, genetic code? And are our children, when they come, likewise doomed to repeat our mistakes, as we repeat those of our forefathers?

I think not.

I will not.

I will find the key to this prison. I will end this game.

It wasn't a very hard thing to do, physically speaking. Certainly no harder than bribing the mortician. It was a private room, at the end of the hall, and the acoustics were such that you could hear approaching footsteps from clear down to the nurse's station. It didn't even take very long. The pillow was big, and very soft, and he was so weak. His lungs were godawful bad, practically emphysemic. Who would notice one more choking spell?

I will know what lies behind those sad blue eyes.

Kane looked at the skull. The beetles went about their task, unmindful of the audience.

Very soon.

WAITING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

mouth of my best friend Linda, all white-robed and smiling angelically with a nifty little halo over her head. This takes a bit more time than I'd originally intended, of course, but I'm absorbed while it's happening.

Now I look at the clock on the dark burnished wall and say "Shit!" out loud, omnidirectionally. No big deal, but I'd only planned to stop in for a quick cup. Oh, well... maybe the Great White Goddess will drop by for some cappuccino. I could certainly dig another cup o' dis! My eyes cast around for the waiter, come up instead with the dark burnished girl at the next table. She is looking at me. I engage her glance. She pulls it away. I smile at the air, then look back to my sketchpad.

Linda's more sensible than I am, really. That's why we couldn't hold it together as lovers. I look at her face, play some scenes in my mind, and then remember what I wanted to be writing. Okay! Smooth movin', Josh! Let's see...

1. You're selling.
2. You've got a little more than enough money.

Okay, we got that covered. I will eat tomorrow. What else?

3. My work is good.

Yeah, man. After all those years of doubt, of quivering fragile inquiries as to the quality of my material, I can finally sit back feeling good. I've learned to reproduce what I see, precisely. And I've learned to see so much...

4. I love my work.
5. My consciousness seems to be expanding nicely.

Yeah, great. But I seem to have changed perspectives here. When I started out, Linda was talking. Now I'm talking. I create CHAOS from the swirling subconscious! Ha...

It's because I was thinking about Linda again; and, truthfully, all of the really great women I've managed to come across (or cum in) over these last several years. WHY WASN'T I SATISFIED? I ask myself for the umpteenth-millionth time...

"Can I get you another cup?" asks the waiter, appearing magically to my left. I jolt upright and turn, surprised, to look at him. He laughs and says, "Hey, I didn't mean to terrify you..."

"It's alright," I say, hurtling back to my body. "Yeah, I'll take another one." He is checking out my list and smiling, wry. He nods twice when I finish speaking and then splits, tossing one backward glance before disappearing from view.

Why wasn't I satisfied? I ask myself more calmly. Better prepared to an-

swer reasonably in this less-feverish state of mind, I pause to consider.

Earlier on in life, I'd decided that no one woman could possibly do it all; further, that no one woman could be reasonably expected to even try. Leading, of course, to the subsequent decision that I'd have to work out some arrangement with a bunch of 'em, tailoring each one-on-one relationship to its unique matrix of matching parts. You know: I'd ski with the ones who were into skiing; I'd eat Chinese with the ones who were into Chinese, Italian with the pasta-lovers; I'd share cosmic revelations with the more spiritually-inclined, drink toasts with the tipplers, take trips with the acid-heads, eat meat with the carnivores and tofu with the Aquarians. I'd share my wit with similar senses of humor, my art with similar tastes of culture, and my bed with similar... appetites. The best of all possible worlds, right? One big marriage to all woman-kind, most assuredly made in heaven.

But it didn't work out that way. Not at all. I even got a chance to try, something that most people never get: I spent two years trying to ride Enlightened Polygamy, only to find it was a wild horse that refused to be tamed. And you know why?

Sex. Pure and simple. Immediately, the wet funk of genital interaction slopped itself all over everything that happened. Alchemical transformation took place. Previously innocuous and unrelated events took on new meaning somehow, always sinister, and usually false. Ski trips were no longer ski trips, for example; they were excuses for shunning Suzanne in front of a big fireplace (only once, in fact... months after the accusation). Not being able to see someone for three weeks meant that I no longer wanted to see them at all, but that's alright (sob sniffle), they'd survive. It was utterly insane, an experiment gone mad; half the time belly-up and ready for mauling. I could...

Ah, but the waiter has returned with a big steaming goodie. I say, "Thanks," as he sets it down before me, and dig in my pocket for change.

"No problem. I make my living by taking orders." It's such an off-hand comment that it makes me laugh. He said it because he knows I can handle it; already, he's back to studying my work-in-progress, looking as though he'd never spoken. I like this guy.

"You haven't gotten very much further on this. Are you running out of blessings, or what?" he adds casually, that same smile on his face.

"Naw. I just cruised my bio-

circuitry for a minute. Spacin' out. You know." He nods while I give up on the concept of change and pull out my wallet.

"This is really good stuff here," he says, pointing to Linda in particular. "You are an artist by trade?" I nod affirmatively; he acknowledges it with another one of his own. "Great," he cheerfully concludes.

"Here, man. Keep the change," I say, handing him a five. He goes wow and really lights up. I flash him the patented winkansmile and hold out my fist, thumbs up. He thanks me very much and sorta dances away. I watch him, while my mind slides over to the subject of friendship; and from there, back into the past...

I lost a lot of friends with that two-year foray into The Unknown. A lot of bitterness, a lot of hurt, and a lot of confusion. It forced me to a new set of conclusions, perhaps wilder and more dangerous than the last. And it set me on this quest.

Quest for The Perfect Love...

I take a tentative sip of my java. It's perfect. I tingle. A cigarette comes to my lips and ignites (purely mechanical act) as my thoughts tumble inward.

Perfect Love. It wasn't Linda, much as I love her. She was the closest I've come, but the differences were glaring, irreconcilable; we kept totally different hours, and she was far gentler than I. My outrage still frightens her more than I like.

Trish. She was wilder, more than kept up with me in the all-nighter department, and was a barrel of laughs besides. But when she asked me to tie her up, I hung it up instead. (Felt like a prude that time, yes indeedee; but the idea's just too fucking alien to me. I'm sorry.)

Then Patty let me know what bondage was really all about, and I'm sure that I'd have been better off with Trish. Because nothing is worse... a hand grenade up the ass couldn't be worse... than the million tiny hooks that the love-loonies wield. That Patty used on me in our hideous year-anna-half together. They're the kind that you don't feel till they're in; and they don't hurt until the first time that you try to pull away.

Ah, the love-loonies. Those miserable scumsuckers. You don't know how deeply I hate what they do. They know that the hooks go in all the soft places, the weak spots that only a lover can know. They seek out the puffy underdeveloped portions of your personality and then shhhHHH! TOO! The hook sinks in so easily, and holds so snugly...

...and it won't let go without rip-

ping a nice big steaming chunk out of you. It won't let go just because you're getting sore. No, boy. It won't let go just because you're crying out and the blood is starting to trickle from all those ugly little cracks. You're gonna bleed, baby! Bleed, before those bastards will let go of you. You're gonna bleed from every lousy hole that's capable of it, baby; gonna take every ounce of will you've got to endure the fucking pain, to take it beyond any point of reason to keep pullin' and keep pullin' while the million tiny hooks just bide their time, happily hangin' on, groovin' to the high-tension hum of invisible wires that absolutely will not snap, waiting for you to end the symphony with a final supreme effort, with an enormous flurry of sucking staccato notes as the hooks finally yank free, studding you with a million wet puckering wounds that will never fully heal.

Yeah, man. And to top it all off, there's the fact that they really do love you, insofar as they understand the phenomenon (precious little, I can tell you); they put in the hooks because that's what they know, that's all they know about love, damn them; the fear, the clutching, and the redmeat punishing-of-imperfections that underlie their fatuous, wide-eyed blissy-wiss.

At any rate: because they love you and because they're human and because you are less than perfect yourself, you love them as well. Though I crawled away from Patty like a savaged dog, like a leper, like an Afghani villager with nothing but Soviet shrapnel in his belly... though she and her kind have so thoroughly defiled the name of love that I cringe every time a voice intones it... though I hate the wretched motherfuckers and everything they so blindly stand for with a passion that leaves me wondering why I never got around to killing... I still love 'em.

I guess that makes me a real nice guy, huh? Or a bottomless fool. Either way, Patty: if I learned one thing from your guided tour of the goddamn pits, it was that you're never too smart to get hooked. You're always capable of that killing stupidity. I was watching out for vampires. I really was. But I was tired, and I let down my guard for a second, thinking I was cool. And you got me.

Never again, man. I'm never letting it down again, man. Not until I know for sure. It's too damn easy to crawl in bed with the wrong woman and let those fluids fly.

Back again, I chug half the cup and kick up a smoke screen. My eyes return to the list I was making and my

hand moves to set down these new illuminations:

6. I got away from Patty (love all bloodied, but intact).

7. I will not give up.

Laughter turns my head. It's naughty-girl stuff (one of my favorite kinds), resonantly issued from the table next door. The dark girl's been joined now by two other women; she's still the most striking of the lot.

I watch her face as she laughs. I marvel at the exquisiteness of her features, the strength in the lines that life has carved across them. Her eyes catch the sparkle of a shaded lamp briefly, and I decide in that instant to draw her.

I light a new cigarette on the last sparks of the old and then put Grampa Filter to rest (a modern metaphor for reincarnation), while my other hand flips the page and proceeds to draw. Meanwhile, the criteria of my quest go chicka-chikka through the ol' data banks.

Looks? chicka-chikka-chik. Yeah, I definitely like good looks, as my marker so reverently testifies. But I'm not real picky. No particular dimension or hues, no particular hairstyles or dress codes on my checklist. I'll never find her in a computer printout of nose lengths and nipple circumferences. That beauty behind the skin, able to shine through even

the lumpiest countenance, is what I seek.

Mental attributes? chicka-chikka-chik. Yeah, I definitely like mental attributes (chuckling, as I sketch in the character lines on her face). Wit, keenness of insight, a logic not so constricted as to exclude the towering absurdity; a dexterity with symbols, a grasp on their meaning, a taste for the eternal (all of these things appearing in the girl's likeness. Am I just embellishing truth, or are they really there?).

Kindness. Gentleness. Inner strength. A sense of wonder, of harmony with the rest of creation. Honesty. Courage. Do I see those, too? chicka-chikka-chik. My hands begin to sweat. I put down the marker for a moment, mind behind the damp forehead reeling, and wipe myself off. Nicotine. Java. The girl at the next table. A hot grin, setting my juices to a boil.

I am terribly close to something; something important. That sense of proximity hangs in the air, thick as dope smoke at a Grateful Dead concert. Thought impulses flash through my head faster than I can decode them, going chicka-chikka-chikka WHAT? a-chikka-chikka ASK HER ikka-chikka OMI ikka-chikka GOD, I chicka-chikka THINK a-chikka-chik SHE MIGHT A CHIK SHE MIGHT A-CHIK I SHOULD A-chikka-chikka-



"Dad, Rob's making faces again!"

WAITING

chikka WHAT IF IT'S...

I snap back into the room, and instantly freak. She's getting ready to pay her bill; the waiter approaches her now. Hey, man! I thought you were my friend! Break your leg on the way over or something! *Detain her!* Just a...oh, shit. I pick up the marker and furiously darken in the portrait's hair. The wild lines give her an adventurous air. We hurtle down dreamlopes together, dodging trees and laughing at Fate. *chikka-chikka-chikka*. My mind floats to...

Interests. Wild movies, wild music, wild books and art and theatre and dance. Philosophy. Metaphysics. Wholism and synthesis and the global transformation movement in general. The environment. Law, and the absence of justice. The future. The past. And most of all, the ever-present: site of all-there-is. (I wonder...does she share these concerns?)

Then she has paid, and is rising to leave. A testicle-sized lump rises in my throat, unbidden; I half-rise out of my seat in alarm. The rest of the goddamn details will be there for your head to fill in, darlin'. It is time for me to...

...very rapidly...

... sign my name (and address and phone number) to the back, just as she and her friends move their shapely ways toward me. It is a classic moment of split-second timing, definitely one to fossilize and file for the generations a-comin'; the last pen stroke, just in time for the first footstep to resound in the floorboards at my feet. Flipping the page over and looking up just in time to catch her eyes and hold them for a second. Just in time for me to open the floodgates of patented Joshua Proctor charm and say, "Hev..."

Just in time to watch those precious features twist into a mixture of annoyance and contempt. Just in time to let my picture-bearing hand petrify in midair as that soft and surely God-sent woman/child nails me with those eyes and says, "Aw, just fuck off, would'ia?"

Just in time to see her rope one arm around one of her woman-friends, who gives me the kind of look usually reserved for lumps of shit on living-room floors.

Just in time to watch her stalk past, leaving a blast of crypt-warm air in her wake, and go out the door.

The picture hangs useless and stupid in my hand. I give it one last quick appraisal. It sucks. I tear it into little pieces and immediately wish I hadn't (it wasn't *that* bad). "I guess that wasn't her," I say to myself, preparing to stick

the shreds of vision into my pocket.

The door opens again.

I turn, slowly, to look.

And you walk in.

I AM SEEING YOU; AND THOUGH THERE IS no thought involved...no thought, no thought at all...I know that you are seeing me. The universe (save us) has locked in stasis: beer frozen halfway between tap and mug, incomplete words dangling in midair. This moment exists for us alone.

For you and me.

We each take a first tentative step toward each other (me not even fully out of my chair) and then stop: stupidly, mortally afraid. Though no more doubt could possibly remain, it's a whole lifetime of doubt and fear that sends rational mind into a desperate flurry of brattling rationalization: *what if it isn't her, you know how close you came a minute ago to fucking up again, what if it is her and you are no longer worthy...*?

I am caught in the sensory distortion of that logical maelstrom, paralyzed by that which passes for reason. Reeling in fear of my heart's ultimate betrayal, because my heart keeps screaming *it's TRUE, dammit! It's TRUE!* My eyes snap shut, focus with insane clarity on the brilliant sub-atomic dance, and I think *omigod, this is too intense to be just another dead-end street. This has got to be, it's got to be...*

And my eyes snap open. And they lock on yours. And I see the same conflict that must show in my eyes; see them mirror my shock at recognition; smile, as we simultaneously reach the same conclusion.

It's true.

My God, its *true!*

IT'S TRUE! I let out a howl of lunatic joy and leap into the air, knocking my chair over and not caring the tiniest damn bit. You are here, you are here, I can't fucking *believe* it! I watch as the chair goes ka-boom behind me, turn to see you suddenly giggling.

As if in cue, the world grinds back into action. It's like opening time at Robot World: everyone jerks to life in ultra-slow motion, while the Great Soundtrack rumbles ponderously into our ears from all directions and steadily accelerates. I spot one old geek who's had his finger in his nose this whole time, withdrawing the dirty digit and examining it verrrrrrrrr slowwwwwwly; that's the end of the line, boy. I lose it entirely.

Suddenly I am running in mock slow motion, arms outstretched, toward

you. You get it instantly, break into matching hysteria. But this ain't Hollywood, and you can't quite bring yourself to sink that low. Besides, you're helpless. I, too, only manage another three or four steps before I'm forced to stagger the rest of the way, clutching my belly and blinded by tears. I stagger, chest flooded with joy, and then we are in each other's arms.

We are in each other's arms, laughing and hugging, while the universe stabilizes. Everything is back to normal, except... you are here. I squeeze you as tight as I can, indescribably happy, wanting to kiss but afraid that we'd bite off our tongues. We gasp for breath, pressed-tight chests pounding.

I love you, I think/feel in one massive burst of internal fireworks, but no words will come. I manage a quick, noisy kiss to the side of your head instead. Suddenly you bury your face in my shoulder, desperation appearing in your embrace; and it is only a moment before I realize that you are no longer laughing, though you shudder more ferociously than before.

Instantly, one of my hands is up to stroke your hair. Wordlessly consoling, my mind fishes for the right words nonetheless. I drop my line into the vast unreason; I cast about in the confusion wrought by your abrupt turnaround. I look for something that will help, put things in perspective. I hear my mind whisper *why are you crying?* and it seems like as good a place as any to start.

But before I can articulate my thought, you bring your lips to my ear; and in a quivering voice both husky and tender, you very quietly exclaim, "I thought I'd never find you . . ." and then break into loud, irrepressible sobbing.

"I know," I murmur, pouring every bit of empathy I have into you, painfully aware of every little scar that the long cold years have laid on me and knowing that each of them has found its counterpart in you. My mind races through the past, flashes on a billion distinct moments of loneliness, futility and despair; I re-experience the anguish in tidal waves of feeling that wash us overunderthru.

And my mind cuts loose from my body somehow to run down the corridor of *your* mind. To see the billion split-second agonies of your parallel quest. To see the forms that your pain and joy have taken.

I see them all. They're all there.
And, omigod, how good it feels to
have someone to share it with! Some-
one who understands *completely*!

It is only a moment before I realize

that I am crying, too.

THE RIDE HOME IS ONE UNSPEAKABLY BEAUTIFUL kiss. It is something from beyond my wildest dreams; it is exactly the way I always knew it would be. Two mouths that were made to engage at the lips, a pair of telepathic tongues. Two souls that have been starving for the taste of each other, now able to feast in boundless abundance. The cabbie may be heading to my place by way of Australia; we'll never know. This is a covenant, written in spit and swirling motion. This is most holy communion. This is... *more important.*

Similarly, the walk through the front door and up the steps fades from memory almost before it happens. Almost as if it doesn't happen; as though ghosts have slipped in from the void to inform us subliminally of the occurrence.

Then we are at the door, laughing again, while I fumble with the keys to my apartment. I think (not remembering, even now) that I never do find the right one, but we kinda just float through the door anyway. I think that's what happens, but I'm not exactly sure.

What the fuck. I don't care. We are inside now; inside. That's all that really matters. We are free now to fully explore each other, without further delay; unencumbered by any physical reality that isn't thoroughly conducive to our... explorations. We pause to hold each other with our eyes in the hallway, then take hands and slide dreamily inward. Deeper. All the way in to where I live.

We wander, then, through the tappings of my life, scattered like flotsam on the shore of my sprawling loft apartment. Here, a series of canvasses near to completion. Here and there, the components of my massive stereo system. Here, a pile of crumpled sheets and clothing, slobbered randomly on a sofa that sits in the spaciousness like an island. We wander like spirits through the huge and emptiness, through the only occasionally brilliant clutter spewed about it.

We wander, comparing notes on this and that: movies we both love; foods; philosophies. It's hardly necessary; a relic from that other life, the life that ended about an hour ago. A mere formality, fun on top but a trifle scary below the surface. We do it anyway, not knowing what else to do, until we reach the bed.

"Seat?" I ask, gesturing with my free hand. You give me a look that says of course, you fool, and we sit. Snug-

gle. Pause, then, to survey the vastness.

I am overwhelmed, suddenly, by exactly how empty my life has been up to now. How *minuscule*, my accomplishments: what measly Bic lighters in an infinite dark sea they've been, flicking on punily to illuminate so *little!* I clench up suddenly, jerking you toward me without meaning to. You have me by the shoulders in an instant, while I grip my face and cower away from the horror of it.

"What is it?" you ask me, all concern and certainly knowing; entertaining only that fraction of doubt that keeps one from jumping to conclusions (another relic). I pull myself together inwardly, try to put a label on it myself. I fish for the words. They come up from the depths like Godzilla and I am dragged by their force.

"It's just so sad," I say with effort, "to look at what I've been. It's like I've been a scrap of a human, picking through the graveyard of my own bones, trying to find the rest of me and rejoicing over every discarded shin I find." No, that won't do it. I try again. "Like I've caved in on the inside, and everything's just rubble all over the place." No. "Like..." and then you shush me, and I am silent.

"It's like one half of you has been missing for all these years," you say,

and the blinders start to slip from my eyes. I blink at you; you are glowing like heaven. I almost cry out, but you are not finished.

"Listen," you say. "Nobody can fill up this empty shell for you. You are not this empty shell. We'll move out, we'll set up the place where we were meant to live. Okay?"

I nod.

"Do you understand what's going on?" you ask. I struggle for a second, while white light burns the last vestiges away.

"We are one being," you say. "We are really, truly, but one being."

And the room suddenly goes shimmery-white. Timeless. Motionless.

And we are on the bed, and I am undressing you

And you are undressing me
And after I am done, then you undress me

And I undress you
And I am you are running flesh over flesh inna hot pulsing HOO boy your my arms legs wrapped around in me you I'm in o

I've been waiting.

All my life.

To meet.

Me.



"I brought along my attorney, Mr. Weingarten."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

gry things to say—good, raw, punchy stuff—but could bring none of it to the surface. He remained speechless, as though dubbed into silence. It all seemed to follow some predetermined course no matter what he did.

M. Rogoff indicated the room's only door. "Come along, Mr. Deutsch. We are going to attend a party. Don't worry—we shan't stay long."

Maurice had screwed around on the barstool to locate the brandy that had been shelved right behind him the whole time. As Peter and M. Rogoff picked their way to the door that once belonged to Morris Butts, P.I., Maurice said, "Just behind me! You are too crafty, Monsieur! To change the scent of the bottle so that my seasoned nose could not inform me of its presence, that is wickedly clever, Monsieur, bordering almost on cruelty." At the threshold of the door Peter heard a cork pop. The dwarf's final words to him stopped him short. "Be wary of the Monsieur," he told Peter. "He ~~is~~ a sly one. He could sell the Devil's own lost soul back to him, with interest!"

NIGHT COLORS FLOWED ACROSS THE streets like liquid neon; the air smelled vaguely of impending rain, giving the cold a sharper edge. Alea had blended into the blue-on-blue juncture of LA sea and sky, embraced the velvet black of the city's night, and tilted herself seamlessly into invisibility. Peter's flesh tingled with her presence, as if she had become a chameleon, and all he had to do was look hard enough to see her again, there against the vapor lamps and slick tarmac and the heavy, wet air.

By this time of night, everything was closed, and that impression summed up Peter's state of mind. He felt locked out. Her loss was like a scalpel sewn up inside of him, and he craved her the way a battlefield craves silence and sanity. He knew defeat. *This is how it ends, always.* Alone, wearied, never quite brave enough to finish it all.

M. Rogoff pointed; Peter drove, keeping his eyes on the road until he could think of something to say.

"Maurice," he said after a few more northbound miles.

"Hm?" M. Rogoff was bestirred from some private reverie. He was doing just fine watching the sights and sounds from Peter's big, fancy motor car.

"He was terrified you were going to cashier him for leading me to you."

"Oh. Mr. Deutsch, Maurice's instructions were explicit. Specifically, he was to be caught by you, and he was to

***"I put it to you, sir:
Would you like to
see her again, now,
tonight?" M. Rogoff
tossed Peter's card
onto the desktop.
"Academic, really.
Of course you
would."***

reel you in by whatever avenue best suited your mental state. Maurice is a talented chap... though to tell him so goes straight to his head. Unlike spirits. If he used his intoxicated-dwarf ploy on you, be sure it was a sham. He drinks constantly, but I've never seen him drunk. I have seen him drink five longshorementypes under the proverbial table with virtually no deleterious effect."

"You mean he's like that all the time?"

"Mm, yes, give or take."

They caught the Hollywood Freeway. All of Peter's roads in life seemed to lead inexorably back to Studio City. He was about to ask again where Alea had gone when the little man interrupted.

"You seem on the brink of giving up. Please don't. Not sportsmanlike. Tonight shall be quite an educational night for you, Mr. Deutsch. All you shall experience, even my seeming inattention, has vast relevance to your problem, which centers on the woman you have named Alea." He sounded like a low-budget swami.

"I have named—?"

"No explanation I could offer, here, in traffic, would make any sense to you right now. It is better to just show you. Dwell on this, in the interim: You never would have met her, if not for me. Nor lost her. She is no longer a part of your life because her core purpose has been served."

An angry stab of feeling in Peter's gut, perhaps the scalpel, slicing away, told him a desecration was being enacted. His eyes steeled and would not admit the image of the little man in the next seat. "So this is all your fault, is that what you're telling me?"

"No, no, no, Mr. Deutsch. It's my job."

He wanted to scream, to slew the Mazda to a tire-rending halt and pummel the little man in fury, to jump the curb and paste a pedestrian, to somehow vent all the frustration and defeat, to cut to the chase. To terminate this two-bit melodrama and end Rogoff's bloody endless narrative. But his passenger cut in ahead of him again.

"Oh. Look. Look!"

They flashed past a three-dimensional billboard the size of a parking lot turned on-end. It presented to the world—noisily—the latest live-action spectacular attraction of the Universal Studios Tour. *See it now.* It was not a request.

Monsieur Rogoff is a master of misdirection, Peter's brain advised, oddly, in Maurice's raspy voice.

See it. Now.

The freeway sloped down, lane upon lane of racing red taillights and bright speedbump reflectors and green signs offering choice exits. You couldn't see the Black Tower from the freeway as easily as a few years before; it had been dwarfed by more imposing monoliths. Peter's eyes sought it from habit—a monarch now deposed, yet still more intimidating than the bigger boys. It was a ruler-straight dark rectangle cropped into the postcard shimmer of the electric skyline, a box of black metal windowed by black glass, which absorbed all surrounding light. To question the Tower with your eyes was to peer into the plunging uncertainty of a mine shaft or abandoned well, and wonder what testy things hungered there, night vision ready to fox you if you were reckless enough to go groping in the dark.

Peter's Mazda had a sticker; it was waved through the main gate by the night guard. One of the studio's vintage jokes was that a corporate presidency automatically opened for the person who could provide more parking. Peter

now saw the trick—simply clock in at three in the morning.

M. Rogoff was probably waiting for him to ask what in Satan's butt-hot Hell they were doing *here*. Peter decided to deny the little man the satisfaction of being so goddamned right. Familiar aches began to roost in his shoulders and spine; crossing the studio lot's threshold brought all the fatigue and frustration of *Sinner* home to his bones. He shrugged, felt them slide away. It was amazingly easy to shuck any sense of obligation to *Sinner*; it had become trivial, disposable.

Above, the Tower reached to blot out the stars. M. Rogoff was looking reverently up one broad black flank. Lights nicotine'd the tinted panes at the very top. Elsewhere in the building, and throughout the backlot, workers were braced against the predawn cold and getting eyestrain in cubicles, attending to what the moguls, in their exquisite simplemindedness, called *product*.

As they approached, another man in security livery unlocked the big lobby doors from within.

"Wasting time," said Peter. He was so tired he was leaving words out of his sentences. "Can't get in without pass."

"You mean an invitation," said M. Rogoff. By means of elementary prestidigitation he produced a stiff white card. The guard grinned at the trick, nodded toward the card, and admitted them.

M. Rogoff stopped, made room for himself, and bowed formally. Then he led Peter. "I believe the lifts are this way."

Peter knew bloody well where the fornicating elevators were, thank you very goddamn....

"You're about to ask one of those questions again," M. Rogoff said, punching the up panel. "Just wait. Wait and see."

Anodized doors parted with a *ding*. Peter thought of big, nasty single-edge razor blades sliding wide. He held fast, worrying his lower lip.

M. Rogoff browsed him, bottom to top. Then he smiled and went first.

THE DOOR GOFER LOOKED AT PETER QUIZZICALLY. Suspiciously. "Excuse me, sir," he said, "but that is hardly the proper attire for this—"

"It's fine, Dolph," M. Rogoff interposed. "He's with me." The gofer retreated. "This evening's soiree is a masque, Mr. Deutsch," said Rogoff.

Peter stared as though consulted about particle theory or recombinant DNA.

A masque. As in *Bal Masque*. Yet

Or the grand masque of the Red Death, as recounted by Poe?"

Peter closed his eyes as slowly as a turtle, to try to keep more headache from leaking in. It did not work.

A masque. A masquerade. Where people wear masks."

For some goofball reason all Peter could think of was music. Mahler's lush Symphony #10; the Adagio. The "Bus Station" theme from Tangerine Dream's score for *Near Dark*. Gabriel croaking about red rain; Exene Cervenka crooning on hungry wolves. Thirty seconds elapsed and his double-crossing memory reminded him to think of Alea once more. The abrupt, scary ending of "She's So Heavy," as unpredictable as the slamming cell door at the finish of the Eurythmics' "Room 101." If you donned your mask—your masque—backwards, did the devil get you with his subliminals?

No mask. No costume. Peter mumbled "Hammer murderer," to the golfer as he entered.

Three interconnecting suites commanded a westward panorama of the Valley, the middle room—the one with the bar—opening onto an Astro-Turfed rooftop patio. Peter could smell dance sweat and Turkish cigarette smoke. Ice clinked. Strangers laughed; the sound was piercing and harsh. A spider-like disc jockey deftly puppeteered a five-turntable spread, spot-lobbing random tape spikes into the gutters between tunes, a different flavor for each room. Butthole Surfers howled through "Sweat Loaf" in the chamber containing the bar. Further back, E. Power Biggs did his Bach thing on Harvard's Flentrop pipe organ. "Gasm rollicked to the end of "Cock Knock" and was supplanted by the Ramones bellowing "Beat on the Brat." M. Rogoff and Peter were standing in the Big Chill chamber. Etta James wrapped up "The Blues Don't Care About You" and the jock set the Temptations to spinning. A CD unit waited its turn while the rotating vinyl discs broadcast soft petroleum rainbows.

"Wondrousl!" said M. Rogoff as the intro to "Psychedelic Shack" hit speed.

Grotesques and arabesques whirled; the dancers spilling through the door and engulfing part of the patio. Easier breathing there, amidst the frenzy. Typically Hollywood. They were all trying to out-Herod one another. Tonight the predominant peer-clique brag of choice manifested in the preponderance of masks crafted by an ex-Las Vegas fashion designer named Russell Zanoza. Killer momentum, gathered around midnight, was still peaking.

"So colorful and alive!" M. Rogoff, again.

A worthy in a jewelled frog mask and leather tuxedo blundered into Peter, drenching his shirtfront with fresh Piña Colada. He did not ribbet. He said, "Sorry, love," and bobbed off, leaving Peter to swab himself with cocktail linens. His garments were three days stale. He found himself queerly grateful that their odor had just been neatly masked by a socially permissible accident.

When he saw M. Rogoff again, the little man was holding a straight double scotch toward him. He expected a *bon mot* about quenching the inner man now that the outer man was drenched. Mick Jagger began to sing of chainsaws on the Bois de Boulogne a room away.

Peter killed the scotch with a grimace, fortifying himself against what promised to be a long charade. Ahh. M. Rogoff took his free hand and led him, like Fred before Ginger, cutting through the throng to home-in on the bar. Long tables supported the savaged remnants of chips, dips, cheeses, rumaki, jumbo shrimps, chicken in Chinese mustard, assorted fondues (now cold) and crumb-strewn hors d'oeuvre trays. An Iranian with a mole near his mouth drew endless espressos and cappuccinos from a steaming brass *faiyuma*. Milk hissed into froth.

M. Rogoff located a high stool. "We shall—how should I say?—hang out here, until we fade from notice. Until new faces obtrude. Finished with your drink? Hm, perhaps you could give Maurice a manly contest. No matter. Do have another. It might render you less hostile toward what I shall reveal to you."

The noise quotient was jarring, yet despite all the aural competition, Peter could capture every syllable. M. Rogoff paused a lot when he talked, enunciating like a scholar who knows the camera is on.

"Wasn't she beautiful?" he said clearly.

Peter began to smell the slant. This was like dialogue. He was supposed to say, *wasn't who beautiful?* He sipped his scotch. It was good, aged, the real stuff, not like the bogus Chivas at Shepard Bonnard's party, where he had met the *who* woman. It seemed centuries distant, but it was easy for him to replay that party now. Here were music and dancers and an available patio.

"I thought she was a party whore. In fact, I think I called her one."

"Yes. Your hostility was returned with understanding and love. Beautiful. I really cannot conjure a superlative for

her, Peter; she was so...superior. And there was the benefit of excellent timing. Timing is everything, is it not? You could not have met her at a more opportune time. You were thrillingly ripe; as vulnerable as a safe-cracker's sanded fingertip."

"Misdirected. I fell for a con. Sue me."

"Peter." M. Rogoff had become familiar, easily shifting from the formal *Mr. Deutsch*. Peter lent it no notice. "I do not take my work lightly. It was not merely a charade, as you think."

"No, it was your job," Peter mocked. "Am I correct in saying that when you met Alea, you were—I believe the common parlance is: 'Going down for the third time?' You were being thoroughly abused by shallow and predatory people, yes? And you were lucky enough to receive exactly the reinforcement you required at just that precise moment. You were not deceived."

"Just fucked." Sour.

M. Rogoff considered his own small, fine hands in their white gloves. "Sexual compatibility is my forte."

"Not what I meant," Peter said. He was annoyed enough to speak while not looking at the little man. "I demonstrated one last jog of faith and got shucked and hung out to dry. I wanted not just anyone, but *her*. I wanted—"

"Mr. Deutsch." Mannered, again. It had the desired effect—it got Peter's attention. Time for serious goods. "Do you *always* get what you want?"

The capers beyond, the dancers and laughs, had melted into an abstract living artwork of flashing colors and crude motion. The noise seemed to fade back further still, to die a small death. Peter watched for a very long minute.

"No," he said. "Never. When I did get what I wanted, for once, I could hardly believe it. I doubted."

"Ah. Ahum! Now we're back on track. Nobody can recognize perfection right off the beam. You can't. I can, rarely, but only because I do the planning. It took time for you to *learn* that she was perfect for you. Just what you wanted. That matured into just what you *needed*. Correct me if I err."

"Great timing. Perfect." Peter's voice was losing inflection, lifeblood leaking from an uncoagulated wound.

M. Rogoff was excited now, prodding the thought chain ever-forward. "And when she began to seem just a tiny bit too perfect to you—?"

"She displayed weakness. She admitted self-doubt to me. Showed me a crack in her armor of perfection." He

ran playback in his head, then shook his head ruefully. "I didn't fall for it. I swan dove. And hit like an anvil into a duckpond."

"But all because of me, Peter. It was all my doing. I love art a great deal."

Peter had fought hard to loathe the image of her face, to summon aversion-therapy at its most brutal. Alea was evil; she had been the destroyer; hers was the fault. Despise her that you might cleanse her from your mind.

It didn't work. It was a patchwork membrane of rationalization too fragile, too transparent for his anger to sustain. Even if Melvin Belli and Perry Mason slapped him with irrefutable documentation that she was a berserker, right here right now, Peter knew that he would never be able to talk himself into hating her.

"Peter." The repetition of his name had a succoring effect. Peter might have used the same technique to hold the attention of a happy dog. "Peter, it simply could not be permitted to last. There was the work to consider, after all. You had *Objet d'Art* and your friend awaiting you in Canada—a definite first step down the path you've craved for so long. The path that leads to the artistic recognition you need as fundamentally as love. But for you to venture there an easy cynic, embittered, walled away from honest feeling, glib and shallow..." M. Rogoff sighed. "At the point I injected Alea into your life, you had been working too long, too hard. You had been through too much. Your divorce. The courts. The psychic decay. Unfulfilling labor. No end in sight. You had injured yourself to pain so heavily that no honest emotion could ever shine through your work. Not even the pain itself. Can you see it now, comprehend it?"

"Bullshit." He hated perceiving only edges. Outlines. And he hated the idea of being outgunned by a little old lunatic who lived in a Bekins warehouse. He drew scant solace from the fact that it wasn't the most humiliating thing that had happened to him recently.

"You're trying to get me to believe that if I'd taken Alea with me to Vancouver, I would've turned into a romantic klutz on *Objet d'Art*?"

"If you had gone without meeting her, the film would have been too dark. Too unforgiving of humanity. If you had taken her there, it would have become worthless hackwork. It would have been a very—ah—*cute* film."

The scalpel stirred, slicing Peter's stomach into strip steak. *Cute* was a

word that had been mated with his directorial output twenty times too many. The Curse of "Cute" was on his head. *VARIETY*—*Cute concept; pedestrian execution. Cute characters. Cute enough to matinee for one week. HOLLYWOOD REPORTER*—*No depth; fails dismally. But cute idea nevertheless.*

Peter to Damon Fletcher, a week before the party at Bonnard's: "Cute! Fucking *cute*! I would put my left nut in a garlic press and give it a mighty squash for the *paparazzi* if I could just evade that goddamn four-letter word just once!"

Damon to Peter: "Nahh. You'd be down one *huevo* and they'd just look up a synonym." They'd both laughed.

M. Rogoff's voice had assumed a lectorial hue. "If you protect yourself from feeling intense pain, you also erect an equally impenetrable shield against being intoxicated by pleasure. Tipping the balance became...ah...paramount. How could you be expected to produce anything of honest artistic significance?"

The little man had in his mind a sepia-toned picture of Maurice, at work sculpting his monsters. Talking to himself, but also vocally coaxing the blood-colored clay into behaving. Investing tears, first the spicy salt ones of anger, then the honeysuckle tears of joy. Sacrificing a mouthful of his precious brandy to knead into his creation. M. Rogoff knew these emotions, and his speech to Peter was born of rough experience.

"Alea served her purpose for you. Are you not now packed for Canada? You're telling yourself that distance is the answer, that escape will win you perspective. What you are not prepared to acknowledge is that now, as a result of your travails, you are girded for the challenge that *Objet d'Art* will be for you. Alea's work was accomplished." His eyes sought the dancers. "She could not be permitted to last for you, any more than she can be allowed to last for that gentleman over there."

Peter followed M. Rogoff's gesture past the dancers. "Willard Pell?" He recognized the writer instantly, even from behind. They had been introduced in the ebb tide of business. With the debut of his second novel, *Come the Wind, Fear the Storm*, Pell had been hailed as "the new Salinger" by *Publisher's Weekly*. He took seriously the advice to relocate to Hollywood. A dumb movie was produced from the ground-up remains of his premiere book, *Jackals*, and the offers that sprang from his second novel all died in development hell. Pell could thrash out scripts as well as any word-processor chimp doing TV,

but had ignored the movie-biz truism that the execs don't pay you for pretty writing—they pay you for the bullshit you are expected to endure, selling your talent to people who have none of their own. Pell made money. Book Number Three somehow never materialized. He tried not to let the great big cogs of the machine munch him too much. Now he stood at another elite party, being seen, a touch overweight, a touch egg-eyed, one more Hollywood victim in a roomful, disinterestedly watching a teller of party tales struggle his way ineptly through some humorless anecdote.

In a crowd where blithely bared tits, mooning, and ostentatious goproxy formed the behavioral norm, Willard Pell was holding hands with a blonde woman whose back was also turned toward Peter.

M. Rogoff pretended to hunt for pineapple juice at the bar. "You wanted to see her. There she is."

"Sexcrime" fired up. From the room beyond, "Addicted to Love."

Peter pushed off his stool and instantly felt the scotch slugging him. He executed a sort of dreamy beeline for Willard Pell—the only other attendee not in costume. Like Peter, he did not require one. They were both clowns. Fools, but in the medieval sense.

As he reached to tap the blonde woman's shoulder she spun as though they were waltzing. She held to her face a masque of immaculate blue glass which complimented perfectly the azure of her gown, a floor-length job in drifting gossamer. Cuts of it lagged in the air like Indian veils with each of her motions; they waited to rest as Peter stood unmoving, trying to see through the masque.

He saw that the blonde hair was not a wig. Details piled into its toil-worn and prostrate brain: Same height. Same general build. The planes of her face, even concealed by the masque, were different. He knew the lips would be fuller—the upper with more pronounced peaks; the lower more rounded and plumply sensual. The cheekbones would be more Scandinavian. Her hair, her massy handfals of natural wheat-blond hair, left her scalp in a different pattern, framed her face in a new way.

Gone was the tiger-eye; through the cut cyan glass he could not see the amber flecks he'd expected. Peter thought of Tragedy and Comedy with their eyeballs gouged out. Glass could be sharp and sneaky. The eyes, the only humanity the glass masque would permit him, were the amplified blue of the Arctic sky, a color you saw if you held a flawless blue-white diamond to the sun. Peter



fancied he saw a borealis in each.

She removed her masque—it was on a wand—and smiled at him. "Have we met, sir?" It was neutrally pleasant; an open, civil smile for an as-yet-unintroduced friend.

He tried to say her name and his voice drowned. His hand tried to reach for one of hers but didn't quite make it.

Willard Pell cast a nervous glance—he had to—toward his clique before cutting in and snatching the hand Peter had missed. He was almost petulant. "Uh—Peter?" He stammered. "Why, Peter Deutsch! I'd...um...like to you meet my fiancée, Michelle—"

Her smile harpooned Peter, and emptied him of hope. It was more notice than he'd given her upon their first meeting, at another party, so far away now, and her smile had not changed in any way. Peter knew its form indelibly. And now, in its depths, he saw nothing of himself, nothing for him, nothing whatsoever.

"I'm sure you've seen Peter's work, love, he's the one who—ah, directed, right?—*Mad Horizon*, and—"

Her teeth are identical, Peter thought through rocking waves of disorientation. The veins in her neck trace exactly the same way. Her smile, her eyes....

"Geez, what was the name of that miniseries you did for Daystar last year?"

It was bullshit, pungent, Hollywood's finest kind, and Peter was expected to spoon it up like everybody else. It was why the pay scale was so high. "Rock Messiah," he said, empty of inflection.

The woman smiled at him diplomatically, from a vast distance, as Pell leaned forward. "Peter," he whispered, "What in hell is the matter, man? You look like a sack full of curb scoopings."

The writer's face was a runny amalgam of mild shock, slight embarrassment, fair-weather brotherhood, light revulsion.

You deserve everything good in the world.

From the stool, M. Rogoff nodded, a buoy in a typhoon. Already Pell's group sought some detour from Peter. *It's okay—he's been drinking.* Peter backed off with a choked-off utterance he hoped sounded apologetic. *I heard he actually signed to do that garbage script for SINNER.* He had to get back to M. Rogoff. *He hasn't been the same since his second wife dumped him, I heard.*

His mouth was amazingly dry. M. Rogoff handed him a delicate stem goblet of amber wine.

"You see?"

Peter gulped the wine, then pinched the bridge of his nose hard enough to whiten flesh against bone. He renewed his long-distance overview of the woman in the blue gown. "It is. Christ. It's her." His face was contorted by a soft wonder. It was nearly awe. Beneath it, the anger remained, on hold. "What have you done to her? I don't understand how this can happen. Who—?"

He was cut off by M. Rogoff. "Ask me just who I am; that's next." He patted Peter's shoulder. Good puppy. "Now we can go talk a bit in a more salubrious atmosphere. And eat. I'm famished, young man. These cocktail calories just won't suffice."

Peter tried to stop the little man as he gave up the barstool. "No. We... can't. Can't go. I can't just leave her. Here. Like this."

M. Rogoff took his hand again. Frankenstein leading his feckless creation. "Dear Peter. My friend. She is not yours to leave, or take. Can't you

THE FALLING MAN

understand?"

Peter did not understand.

Peter. Get out of here.

The party sloshed noisily into the hole left by their departure. Five minutes later, it was as if the director and his eccentric little companion had never been there at all.

IN THE ELEVATOR, M. ROGOFF TAPPED THE panel for the sub-basement and the doors knifed back to frame the chintz-less underpinnings of the Tower—concrete corridors, stacked cardboard boxes, cold fluorescent tubes; workers' rest-rooms, dead inventory.

Peter remembered the tunnels. Universities had them, government buildings had them, Disneyland had them, and the Tower, that maze of shape-shifting modular offices and incredible shrinking tenures, had them in spider-web profusion. They were the secret panels that the veepees and attorneys used to shuttle script revisions, executive edicts, and angst from one soundstage to another. They accommodated electric golf carts. M. Rogoff and Peter hooped it.

The tunnel into which M. Rogoff led him was damp and poorly lit; Stage 13 was gloomy and oppressive.

"Where are we now?"

"Safest place in the world," said M. Rogoff, his voice booming in the stage's cathedral acoustics. Light bled into the vast and empty blankness, then gushed, and Peter's pupils shied from the brightness as he saw a bank of lighting rheostats with M. Rogoff's white-gloved hands on the levers.

They were standing in a graveyard. The little man's eyes sparkled with their own interior current.

It was a movie sham-Necropolis, larger than death, an exaggeration. Studying a carpet of gray moss were chipped and canted monuments, custom-eroded to highlight their uniform age and decay. They were boxy and massive; the names emblazoned upon them ostentatious. Lost memories that had never existed. Tombstones of this ilk were illegal now in sunny Southern Cal. Ordinances demanded that grave markers lie flush with the turf to facilitate groundskeeping.

This was not real. Peter's eye shifted to director mode. The set was huge and visually contiguous; shots could be effected from almost any angle. Tinder-dead prop trees leaned upward without off-camera support. No visible wires. A forced-perspective crypt stood in arrogant shadow against what he assumed to be a large sky cyclorama, shaded for twilight. It would dissolve to an impres-

sionistic limbo once the smoke hoses were turned on. The whole gag was vintage 1940s monster movie stuff.

They were beyond backstage, two paces deeper than behind the scenes, alone in the dark heart of the cinema beast.

This evening Peter had been shown what he'd asked to see...and the sight had ruptured a valve in him, greedily suctioning out the dregs of his emotional pain. He'd been left giddy and reeling. He felt just like Wile E. Coyote on the downside, snoot bashed crooked and eyes crossed, just as the cliff ledge shears away an inch past his clutching toes. The plunge into the bottomless blue of Alea's new eyes had rendered him vacant even of pain, and everything might somehow come out all right—if only he did not look down.

"Peter?"

Chemical mist seemed to follow M. Rogoff down into the middle of the cemetery. "Don't gawk back at the reality we just left. Do come forward, into this one." He resumed his window shop-

ping amongst the tombstones. "That Forest Lawn. Pahl! A disaster area. Immortality of a most repugnant sort. Ah. Right here, I should think."

Peter waded in and caught up with the little man at a stone oblong like a tipped-over refrigerator. The name etched into each face in florid Gothic characters was DEUTSCH.

M. Rogoff cracked his Gladstone bag. With a magician's flourish he shook out a checked tablecloth, spreading out the creases atop the gravestone, which rose to waist height. "Voila!" Next came neat plastic cases containing summer sausage, a wedge of white cheddar, a cluster of green seedless grapes. A skinny loaf of sourdough bread followed. No preservatives. A pair of matching goblets in hand-blown green glass. A knife. A flagon of wine with a crooked cork.

"Good heavens!" Peter said. "You forgot the candles."

"Tut, tut." M. Rogoff withdrew a pair of thin tapers. They were wilted into bow shapes. "Light these, please, while I eat. I'll try to be satiated by the time you arrive at the next of the questions burning into your soul." He set about slicing precisely into his viands. "Isn't it intriguing?"

Peter balanced the first lit taper into a puddle of melted wax. It froze and held. The candles smelled of jasmine. This time he spoke his line on cue: "Isn't what intriguing?"

"Two hours ago, all you could think of was seeing her again." M. Rogoff chewed and swallowed a mouthful of bread and sausage. "You'll notice she wasn't on your mind again until I mentioned it. Have some more wine."

The bottle unstopped musically, and Rogoff poured more of the mystic yellow wine Peter had already sampled at the party. They watched as amber liquid met green glass and produced a mellow blue light. Its taste made Peter hungry. He filched a disk of sausage and reluctantly let it bring his appetite back. He had tried to run too far powered by alcohol and stubbornness alone.

"What is the next question burning in my...you know."

"You wish to know—why you? Why all this pain for you?"

Almost everything M. Rogoff said hurt. This did not. Instead of feeling exhausted, Peter was beginning to feel tired, yet capable. "Isn't there enough pain for everyone? Did I get a double share or something?"

"Yes to the first question, no to the second. You were specially chosen. I never choose frivolously. Ah! See? You

**Now the boneyard
made hideously
logical sense. This
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can hold the steamroller impulses of youth in check. That's refreshing. It allows an old man like me to indulge his sense of the dramatic. Some of us can't help viewing life from the proscenium arch, don't you know." He popped grapes into his mouth as conversational punctuation.

"I noticed," Peter said. "Presto change-o." The scalpel jabbed his soul; took a sample nick.

"Pah! Even our dear Mr. Pell shall derive ultimate benefit from his private pain. But only for his art, and thus, for himself. There is another great novel in his future."

"He loses a blonde and gains a magnum opioid by suffering? Terrific formula for success you've worked up, there. Maybe you could bottle it. How are you at suicides?"

"No need to get caustic, Mr. Deutsch. Hear me out. You have much more to accomplish than does Mr. Pell. That woman will serve the purpose for him the way her Alea incarnation did for you. But you are not merely going to make an artful film. I would not have selected and cultivated your emotions and brought you here if that were all. I need you to do still more. For me. Permit me a touch of uncertainty as I search for the correct words... you are very special and I've never tried to present a case like this before."

"Hm. I owe you so much."

"You shall. What do you think of what you saw upstairs tonight?" M. Rogoff's voice notched down into dead seriousness.

Peter had devoted some meditation to that one. "It implies processes I don't even want to consider."

"Ah. But regardless, you still love her boundlessly, and would do nearly anything to win her back, correct? You see the path as insane. The destination to which it leads is quite rational. That's not linear thinking." He speared a shard of cheese with the knife, using it to point at Peter. "You, sir, are a true romantic."

The draughts of amber wine were buffering Peter's adrenaline and calming his raging stomach. His head stopped hurting. He felt extraordinarily lucid. "And you—sir—have never been in love. Of course. Have never made such an ass of yourself."

"*Au contraire*, dear Peter—how do you think I got this job?"

That was good for one more near-overload of Peter's circuits. His eyes flashed up to meet the little man's. Trauma lurked in there, laying ambush.

"Oh, I know what you're going through about now," M. Rogoff proceed-

ed. "And I'm very good at what I do. You are proof."

"Great. I feel like shit. Which, according to Willard Pell, I also look like. Doggy doo, to be specific."

"Normally, I would have been finished with you the other night," M. Rogoff elucidated. "And now you would be in Vancouver, morbidly filming a depressing box office failure. Naturally, you'd continue to work. But you'd never get better than average. Better than 'cute.'"

Again the scalpel, poking minute holes, starting leaks. "But I had to go and get chosen by you," said Peter. He toasted the little man with a smirk and found his glass empty. "Wonderful. But what for? Now what?" The pallid cemetery fog stank of CO₂ and dry ice.

"Now your career will regain lost ground and sail into the black." M. Rogoff was still eating. "You should know that you are, in fact, poised on the brink of your most significant undertaking! More wine?"

Peter felt, in fact, coyote-silly. "Lordy. Better hold me back." He spoke to the foot-high letters that spelled out his name as the deceased, and when he looked to see whether M. Rogoff had gotten the joke he found his glass full to the brim again and the little man bashing proudly onward, as effervescent as a newsreel announcer, excitedly zooming toward his own kind of dramatic climax.

"I tell you now that this shall be a project that shall dwarf all your previous achievements—ahem!—drawing its inspiration from the most unusual of biographies." One gloved finger jutted skyward as he struck a declamatory pose. "My own!"

Incredibly pleased with himself, he held the pose and watched Peter's awareness dawn by degrees.

Peter's glass drifted down. He shook his head, then spoke, to the grave-stones. "Son of a bitch. It really is true. Every single person in this goddamn town WANTS TO GET INTO THE FUCKING MOVIES—I"

The little man recoiled a half step, hat tottering, his chin pulled in at Peter's outburst. "I was hoping you would accept your good fortune with a bit more, ah, decorum, Peter, I—"

"ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING?"

"Please, Mr. Deutsch." Noise appeared to pain M. Rogoff; both hands had risen apprehensively. "I was expecting a tot more gratitude. And a bit less vulgar slang."

"GRATITUDE—!" Peter had quickly learned he could discomfit his opponent by screaming. He enjoyed watching the little man flinch. In fact, this felt pretty

goddamned good.

"What has happened to manners, respect?" M. Rogoff was running on, like a dribbling faucet, back in monologue-land. "That is what one reaps from tilling a solitary field, I venture. Hm! No sense of peers, of community! One loses touch, I suppose, eh? Well! I am not accustomed to such... *extreme* and—"

"Stop prattling or I'll yell again," Peter overrode flatly. He sensed leverage. Maybe now was the time to haggle.

"Young man, as of this moment you know more about me and my work than any mortal. I've outlived generations of my... well, my subjects."

"Your victims."

"Mine is a story that needs to be told, and by someone of your fine sensibilities," he continued, suddenly seeming no more confident than the hungry independents and self-conscious on-spec writers Peter routinely fielded as a necessary evil.

"You're not kidding?" He felt groggy. "You actually believe I'd do something like that for you?"

"I'm not a child, Peter," M. Rogoff turned his tone cold and pragmatic. He was quite adept at speed-shifting. "You would do anything for even the slimmest chance at getting Alea back, if only for a moment, so you could tell her the lines you so need to tell her."

A shudder squeezed a chilly egress up Peter's backbone. He had dismissed Alea from this weird equation, concentrating on how best to blot out the dull ache of loss. Now the boyonard made hideously logical sense. This was the ultimate Hollywood pitch: the deal-making over comestibles, complete with clandestine bribery and the ceremonial proffering of perks. *Have your girl's machine call mine; we'll do lunch.* Sometimes such words were the invitation to one's own execution. Now Peter perceived the proposition, and it provoked a shiver in him despite the warm glow of the booze.

M. Rogoff gave the nail one more good whack before Peter could react. "Now—given that you must learn literally everything about me in order to faithfully represent me in a script, why not then take the next step and do it? Take my actual place in the world. My inheritance is yours."

"Wow. Such a deal." Peter was hanging tough.

He decoded the little man's short snort of disdain to read: *You can't make light of this offer anymore than you can turn your back on true art. Youngster.* Peter snorted right back, just as

THE FALLING MAN

snooty, just as aristocratic: *Oh, yes I can, you fossil fart.*

"I am a durable old wretch but I shan't last forever. Maurice, as you've seen, would make a lamentable replacement. This ariform demands so much more—excellent taste, finesse, a stringent sense of proportion, stylish choice-making, and, most critically, *timing*. That last, I think, is a specialty of yours."

Stylish choice-making, thought Peter. Some choice! It reminded him of those dumb comparisons you make as a child: *If you could pick the way you hadda die, what would you pick?*

Peter assessed the man who had

volvement. I'll need you to handle it. Eh—finish your cheese. Peter. Don't tell me you've come this far, reached this high juncture and are still capable of disbelief? Yes? Would you prefer some slight of hand as reinforcement? Elementary magic? The cup-and-balls trick, or the magic slates?"

Peter shook his head no, and finished his cheese.

"It is my misfortune, and perhaps the world's, that neither I nor my position are genuinely unique, as I've said. You'd think one of me would be enough, as you've said. But, in fact, there's someone else." He tapped off

said Peter, *"the woman...and you want me to..."*

"Exactly," said the little man, proud that Peter had read his basic plotlines accurately.

That was all it took to burst the crumbling dam.

Peter laughed out loud. The laughter, freed, ripped from him. He hooted and capered and slapped the bogus tombstone with his name on it. He sucked wind and giggled and choked and blew forth vast salvos of laughter, possessed and scruff-shaken by mirth. Fake fog hightailed it away from his lips. His sounds made monstrous echoes.

"You want—" By now he was gasping. "You want me to bring you two back together?"

"Who knows?" M. Rogoff overdid his shrug. "The woman is bloody near impossible. Intractable! Contentious! But look at your own crystalline reasoning! Look at what you've just told me and deny you are exactly the person I require. Deny that I have chosen correctly!" He recharged his goblet with triumph, smiling too.

"You were in love with her." It was honest incredulity.

M. Rogoff waved his hand. "You were in love with Alea. She began as you are now; her first step was also the fine vintage you are enjoying at this moment. I amplified her astonishing capacity for giving a lover exactly what is needed. By consenting to allow me to amplify you similarly, you shall not only function at the apex of your talent, but you shall become like her... therefore closer to the essence of what she is. No two works of art are alike."

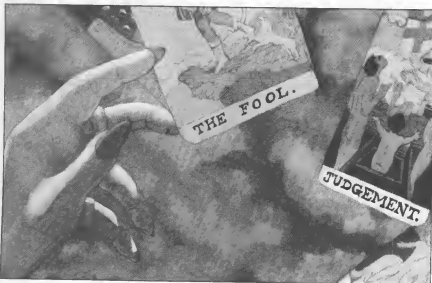
He raised his full glass in a tentative handshake toast. "So, sir, why don't you and I both get started?"

Yeah, wouldn't that be a corker of an ending, Peter thought. Arm-in-arm, the loveable rogues and reluctant collaborators sashay into the moviola sunset as the music swells and the slush credits roll double time. As far as M. Rogoff was concerned, the curtain had been rung down and it was high time for the audience to go home happy.

Consummation time. Time to ink the pact, to get on with it... or go sniffing for a new deal.

Peter's gaze was magnetized to the little man's free hand. The spotless white glove held aloft the masque of cyan glass he'd last seen in the possession of the woman now called Michelle. It absorbed the light. M. Rogoff placed it gently, almost reverently, between them in the center of the monument.

Abruptly, Peter knew the grave-



engineered his emotional destruction, a man now tossing him a pitch so unhinged that all he could do was hang on and fight to pay attention. How weird could it get, and when would it quit?

Don't sell yourself short, she had told him.

"Mind you, I am not going to shuffle off the coil anytime soon. Past the chore of my biography—I don't wish to die undocumented, you see—how would we resolve the wrinkle of having two men qualified for the same unique and esoteric job?"

"Why don't you be so bold as to tell me, dad?" Peter rolled his eyes, impatient as a tourist at a border-crossing. Was there or was there not a hope of seeing Alea again?

"Delighted to," He paused for effect—he did everything for effect—and dabbed wine from his lips with a corner of the picnic tablecloth. "We give you, as your first assignment, a case I am emotionally incapable of processing objectively. I have been holding in the backlog file a case in which I have a personal interest. That prohibits my in-

into an almost moonstruck sigh. The relays in Peter's brain clicked positive even as he gulped to swallow surging hilarity. This was all getting a tad too nineteenth-century. "A woman. A woman who does what you do. Your opposite number..." He let it hang.

"With whom," submitted M. Rogoff, still munching, "do you think I was in love, Peter?"

At first, Peter's laugh was only a strangled noise of hilarity. "I don't believe it." He murmured this knowing what rotten dialogue it was. *It's crazy, but it just might work!* Or: *We can't stop now for a lot of silly native superstitions!* He believed it, all right.

"Would you care to consider the processes that implies?"

Peter's hand leapt to cover his mouth but the smile was unstoppable now. He affected a cartoon voice: "So y'see, C.B., dere's dis broad, da flip-side of dis character here, and what he wants our guy to do is—"

M. Rogoff returned the smile, made it encouraging. He urged Peter, with a nod, to continue. "There's a woman..."

yard as pure facade—saw the baby spots and lighting rigs bolted to the overhead ironwork. Saw the wall padding and seams. To the peripheral left he saw refrigeration vents and the squat, oily smoke generators. They had a hydraulic-lift stink about them. Real dust swam in beams of ersatz twilight. He saw the machines and gears that made it all so atmospheric on film, and hesitated.

Not real. This graveyard was a bastille of illusion. He lifted the blue glass masque and saw the ghost of his old face flowing over its smooth contour. The image hit one of the eyeholes and dropped in; cloudy water down a drain, one swirl and gone.

Then came the ticklish feeling that the teleplay for *Sinner*, probably in its eleventh revision by now, was going to stay stented on his dining room table, destined for coaster service. The hair on his forearms raised as though charged.

In Peter's head, the voice of the little man, always two steps ahead, always so goddamned sure. *Now your eyes are supposed to flare, and in a spasm of rage you smash the glass masque. Ready? Action.*

"We should get started." It was not a question; not really a repetition. "Since I already know this story by heart, we should get started, huh?"

Almost casually, he spun the masque back toward the middle of the checkered tablecloth. They were playing chess, for godsake. It clattered—the sound of real glass being threatened—but did not break.

With an irritated puff of breath, M. Rogoff bent forward—the height of the monument stone was a nuisance—and slapped the masque with the flat of his hand. It made a death sound like fracturing a mirror tile with an elbow inside the rolled-up sleeve of a flannel shirt. When the little man lifted his hand, Peter saw the masque had gone to sand the color of Bimini diving water and a thousand sharp tongues and slivers. The eyes were gone.

M. Rogoff picked points of blue glass out of the palm of his hand. Some were seated deeply. There was no blood. It looked to Peter like film of the fragments being meticulously inserted, like pins, into the cushion of M. Rogoff's hand, projected in reverse. Little punctures. No blood.

"Are we happy now?" said the little man.

What in hell did he have left? Peter reached for his own goblet and stopped short. The sound of the masque breaking had startled him; this sound of glass

disintegrating against the stone bearing his name. It was hewn of actual mineral; it had to weigh a ton, minimum, no bullshit. Why wasn't this a foam rubber fake? Papier-mâché?

"Mr. Deutsch?"

Staring at the broken, eyeless face of the ideal lover, Peter swallowed his goblet's last sip of yellow wine and broke it, experimentally, against the stone. *Crash.* Rock beats glass.

"Oh, good," said M. Rogoff. His tone did not mock. It was appreciative.

He thought of all the deals that had been near enough to soil him. The lies, the ass-covering, the grabs and misses and fervent wish that nothing stinks too much beneath the teak paneling when the first weekend box office grosses roll in. Everybody gets what they want... except the ones for behind the scenes, where someone always got trodden, where one more ethic wound up dead and rotting. The way they sucked you in was with the felicity, the seductiveness of their offers. The way you kept control was by calling the setups. The essence of survival in such an arena was to insure that the fall guy was never you, and as a director, Peter had only understood that power one way. Until now.

Inside him, the scalpel dug, uncaring.

The little man needed an apprentice. A biographer. A matchmaker. And beyond. Peter knew what he needed, or rather, knew with sky-blue clarity who he needed. A perfect deal, and a perfect excuse to break all those old pacts, with escalators and incentives.

Even for the perfect deal, Peter did not think he could sign his name in that sort of blood.

The little man cocked his head, as though reading his thoughts. "Peter? I don't personally believe in gods or devils or deities vain enough to capitalize their own pronouns. I believe in people. I certainly believe in myself, and I love doing what I'm good at—arrangements. I had felt sure I'd come to the right place and chosen the correct candidate for my very special offer. This matter is no trifle to me. But now it occurs to me that even I, with my spotless record, might have erred. If so, I heartily apologize. You are, naturally, under absolutely no obligation to accept my offer."

The phrase was so clichéd it reminded Peter of the junk mail come-ons his eye automatically dismissed. YOU MAY HAVE ALREADY WON \$50,000! He experienced brief phosphene flashpops of being able to engineer love, processes;

to multiply a millionfold the pain he had been convinced he'd felt.

"Peter, if you did not know the story by heart, you would not be standing across from me now. Don't you think that I know my job?"

The scalpel ceased prodding and gave Peter a gallows tickle. He found himself helpless to resist one more yank of the chain.

"You mean you wouldn't be just a tiny bit disappointed if I told you to get stuffed?"

Blood evacuated from the little man's face in a rush. His own goblet slipped between slack fingers to break apart on the monument stone. Wine flowed into the checkerboard weave, darkening it as a good, robust Red might have. Lees spattered the fragments of cyan glass on which her special smell still faintly lingered.

"Thought so," said Peter, realizing that the little man would know the breaking of glasses to be a very traditional way of sealing a bargain. He did not need to be told. Peter was getting the hang of this sort of thought. "Never mind. Just kidding. So when do we start?"

As artificial twilight yielded them to genuine night, the two men walked together from the graveyard, discussing, with much expressive waving of hands, how—precisely—they might begin.

THE MAJOR ARCANA OF THE Tarot—the Greater Trumps—are actually predated by the Minor Arcana, whose suits of wands, cups, swords and pentacles signifying fire, water, air, and earth, gave birth to the clubs, hearts, spades, and diamonds of modern-day gaming cards. It is from the Minor Arcana that a "court card" is chosen to symbolize the person whose Tarot is being read. Called a signifier, this card anchors the subject's Tarot throw and embodies certain general traits. Signifiers are never chosen from the Major Arcana.

There is one conditional exception.

Every so often in the whirl of centuries there is born a person who so perfectly fits that lost card of the Tarot, The Falling Man, that no other card will answer. That person, man or woman, may be caught and crushed by the card's unforgiving physics. Or may be strengthened by enduring and surviving them. But it cannot be said that this card signifies one individual among billions. Rather, the individual epitomizes the qualities of the card.

That person, luckless or blessed, empowered or destroyed, is The Falling Man. ■

LONG LIVE THE "KING"

COMMENTARY BY
JENNIFER STEINHAUER



FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO DON'T GET OUT MUCH AND STILL believe that Elvis Presley is dead, I've got news for you. He ain't even sick. From what I've been told, he's healthy, happy, and really enjoying the soup specials in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I know this because I had lunch there myself not too long ago. According to the marquee at the restaurant where I ate, the King of Rock and Roll also eats—and lives—in that lovely Midwestern city. It's also been reported that he considered singing at a high school commencement, and he is often seen grocery shopping at the local A&P.

That infamous tabloid *The Star* kicked this whole thing off with a report that the tired and disillusioned Elvis faked his death ten years ago to escape the public eye, and grabbed a pad in Kalamazoo, in hopes that he wouldn't have to "love anyone tender," at least for a couple of years. The story was confirmed by a Kalamazoo resident who said that she spotted Elvis driving a red Ferrari.

Of course, reports of Elvis appearing here and there are nothing new. Many have claimed to see his ghost, and according to one tabloid, he even spooked a couple of cows over in Germany last spring. But this time it seems Elvis is back to stay—he isn't just visiting, he's become a registered voter. He has made his home in Kalamazoo, and he isn't frightening anyone. In fact, everyone feels pretty good about it. His name shows up on shop signs and I saw Elvis IN KALAMAZOO tee-shirts and bumper stickers are the latest rage.

Even college kids have run into him. It was reported on WIDR, Western Michigan University's radio station, that Elvis was in the university's financial-aid office, seeking extra funds to attend classes in the fall. Seeking financial aid and driving a Ferrari? That's so "eighties."

But wait a minute, Elvis was the essence of fifties culture. Now that he is alive and well (stranger things have happened, even in Kalamazoo), why are we seeing him in a red Ferrari? Why are we imposing eighties culture on him? More importantly, why is he letting us?

BECAUSE ELVIS ISN'T AVAILABLE FOR QUESTIONING AS I WRITE THIS (I think it's double-coupon day at K-Mart), I have to draw a few of my own conclusions. I have been told that Elvis looks great, twenty years younger, in fact. This is difficult

for me to imagine, because my perceptions as a twenty-year-old of Elvis Presley are quite different. My memories of his death are of a bunch of sobbing Southern ladies lining up to hang around the ostentatious house of some polyester-clad, washed-up fat man with a serious pharmaceutical problem.

But closer inspection of old news clips and conversations with women my mother's age reveals a different Elvis: a sensual figure in black leather who represented all those things that were dangerous and forbidden in the fifties. To my mother, and her entire generation, the death of Elvis represented the end of something significant; the end of a man who sang their feelings and needs and let them dance. That may be why some people need him back.

It seems that many of my generation (myself included) are a little weak on history. We don't remember that the fifties were a time when the political and social tone was very straitlaced. There was a great attempt made to normalize kids by steering them toward financially stable careers and "clean" lives. (In that way, it was alarmingly like the eighties; materialism on top and social consciousness under the rug. The only difference is, kids today like it that way.) Despite the fact that a major world war had just ended, the spirit was not cynical or jaded. There was a real sense of innocence and optimism.

Kids in the fifties wanted to rebel against all of this just a little bit, just enough to make them feel like they were more than just synthetic images of their parents' good intentions. Elvis stood for something entirely different than a good game of baseball, a glass of whole milk and bed before eleven. In fact, he was the antithesis. He told kids to stay out late, make your parents mad and feel good about feeling bad. He brought their internal rhythms to life musically, without ever being really dangerous. He validated that it was okay to feel sexy, to feel needed, or to think of people as nothin' but hound dogs. It was benign sex beneath a leather jacket, and it made kids feel important. Elvis was their culture.

In reality, it was a safe sort of rebellion. Elvis, after all, grew up a nice boy from the South who went to church on Sunday. He represented the beginning of something very exciting and new in the industry, but we tend to forget in retrospect that Elvis borrowed a great deal of his musical genius from black musicians. He didn't play with the boys who inspired him, that would have been unthinkable for a Southern boy, but he took their basic rhythms, threw in a little religion and some lyrics that made everyone feel tough when they wanted to feel tough, and real nice and soft when they wanted to dance slow, and white kids went crazy. Elvis was not the inventor, but rather the interpreter. As Lisa Walker said in an essay in *The New Yorker*, "It didn't matter how or why you loved Elvis, only that you did."

Elvis represented the first big success at marketing "youth culture." Rock 'n' roll was put in a slick package and was sold to kids for big money. Elvis was transformed from a man to a legend, complete with a tragic ending. After that it steam-rolled—Beatles, Stones, Bowie, Bruce. Truck on through the years and arrive at the eighties. Peace signs have been replaced with dollar signs. For a large portion of this generation, the music that matters is made by men with big musical instruments, even bigger hair, and lyrics that are alarmingly brutal. Too many of today's kids are so self-involved and so disinterested that they have no time to listen to or read about anyone who might make them feel any differently about themselves.

The eighties have been a decade of disposable culture. Our cultural icons today are people with a lot of flash and a limited vocabulary, like "professional wrestler" Hulk Hogan or a bull terrier that apparently consumes lots of "lite" beer. These two creatures have made more magazine spreads than FDR ever did, and we probably won't recognize either of them in ten years.



SO WHY IS ELVIS BACK? MAYBE HE CAN STILL EXCITE US BECAUSE he has that staying power of a good time. These days, most things are only fun for a few minutes. We like what we like and then we're bored and we like something else. We don't worship people anymore, no matter who they are or what they represent. Today we worship things. Like cars that make us feel important and crystal rock formations that make us feel safe.

With this in mind, I'm not at all surprised that Elvis pretended to die ten years ago. People were starting to forget how he made them feel. They started getting really concerned with money-market funds and CD players and other shiny stuff. Maybe all that blinded everyone's eyes and made them see little flashes. When the flashes died, Elvis came back.

But Elvis is no fool. He knows the eighties aren't the fifties. Try as he may, Elvis isn't going to find sixteen-year-old girls in Michigan who will faint when they smell his sweat like fifties teens did. That kind of behavior is really gauche, and young girls these days like men who never let us see 'em sweat. So he's going to do it differently this time. He's going to squeeze grapefruit at the A&P and drink Diet Coke, and drive a red Ferrari instead of a pink Cadillac. We won't be able to catch his sex-soaked drawl on television, but the latest word is that we can talk to him on his nine-hundred telephone line. This way, we can believe in Elvis without even having to see him. Now *that's* eighties.

All in all, it is smart for Elvis to hang around Kalamazoo incognito. As long as he plays it cool, stays packaged, looks clean, he should do okay. And if he comes in a red Ferrari, we'll take him.

So let the legend live on. With our short attention span, any taste of our history has value if it helps us to understand why certain people liked the things they did. If Elvis wants to make a comeback in Kalamazoo, it's okay with me. Letting him live on reminds us that sometimes there is someone, no matter how silly he may seem to us now, who understands us and wants us to feel good. That isn't just a sign of a good marketing ploy, it's a sign that we're human. ■

BOOKS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

what the protagonist finally does for the sake of her child. Apparently there are still some literary frontiers.

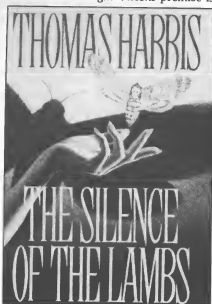
At any rate, "Dedication" is an effectively written piece of human-oriented fiction that belongs in the same company as King's "The Body," "The Reach," and "Mrs. Todd's Shortcut." Its only weak spot is a flatness at the end when the expected happens. This is a story that cries out for a final unanticipated epiphany. But man, it is so close....

George R.R. Martin's contribution is a novella set in the mean streets of some old and nameless midwestern river city. "The Skin Trade" is a soft-boiled detective story about murder, corruption, and werewolfery in high places; a bit like *Chinatown* with fur and fangs.

The author seems to aim for entertainment and largely achieves it. His detective hero is a good-hearted, ugly, and horny sort whose work mainly comes from repossessing large-screen TVs. He is also a lycanthrope. The complication comes when someone—or something—starts killing and skinning others in the local pack.

There's both humor and excitement here—along with a few plot inconsistencies—but it doesn't take an oracle to forecast that "The Skin Trade" will end up as a surefire low-budget film.

The basic *Night Visions* premise is



to showcase two heavyweights along with a newer or lesser-known writer. The hammock in the present volume is occupied by Dan Simmons. Though his first novel, *The Song of Kali*, won the World Fantasy Award, Simmons is not yet a household word in the Old Dark Castle. His stories here should help remedy that. "Metastasis" is a shocking

and personal story about self-sacrifice. Simmons's protagonist discovers an entire ecology built around the organisms that really cause cancer, the predators that hunt them, and the human victims caught in the middle. "Vanni Fucci is Alive and Well and Living in Hell" is something completely different, a savage satire ripping televangelists. "Iverson's Pits" is simultaneously an exquisitely researched Civil War tale and an archetypal EC Comics depiction of grisly revenge from beyond the grave. Set in 1913 at the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, Simmons adroitly spins a nightmarish tale around one of American history's nasty truths.

Along with the same editor's *Prime Evil*, *Night Visions 5* is a "must-buy."

Unholy Trio

Here are three novels all designed to make you nervous. The first is Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs* (St. Martin's Press, \$18.95, 352 pp., ISBN 0-312-02282-4). There is no element of the occult in this book; yet it is just as much a horror novel as the author's superlative *Red Dragon*, a novel to which this present volume is a quasi-sequel. As does its predecessor, *The Silence of the Lambs* addresses the worrisome problem of determining the patterns of, tracking down, and catching serial killers. Serial murderers are a hot topic these days. They are also scary as hell. Vampires and werewolves you can hold off with garlic and silver. Ted Bundy's another story altogether.

In this outing, Harris's protagonist is a young female FBI trainee who finds herself involved in catching the psycho who's killing big-boned women across the south and midwest. And flaying them. Stealing portions of their skins. Clarice Starling has to consult an unlikely ally, the deadly but imprisoned Dr. Hannibal Lecter. "Hannibal the Cannibal" figured prominently in *Red Dragon*. The world's smartest homicidal psychopath, Lecter has his own reasons for helping Starling, at least until the plot kinks and the Good Doctor pulls one of the most astonishing jailbreaks I've ever read. Lecter is a supremely memorable antagonist.

Harris has a few peculiar stylistic quirks, but nothing that seriously interferes with what becomes a story fairly crackling with tension.

Ray Garton's exemplary weirdness in *Live Girls* has dropped off a bit in his new novel, *Crucifax* (Pocket, \$3.95, 326 pp., ISBN 0-671-62629-9). Effectively a change rung on the Pied Piper of Hamelin myth, *Crucifax* takes teen sui-

cide as its core and describes a mob of San Fernando Valley teens corrupted and imperiled by a sinister white-haired, golden-eyed stranger (sure to be played by Richard Lynch—with tongue inserts by Gene Simmons—in the eventual movie). Though the book's extremely



readable, I wondered whether the author's heart was truly in this one.

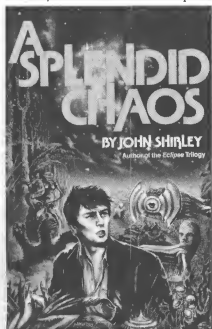
What's most effective in *Crucifax* is also, ultimately, the problem. Garton writes convincingly about adolescent characters painfully negotiating the perils of adolescent angst. But as an adult writer, he should incorporate an adult parallax view so all us presumably adult readers can form a more empathetic—and sympathetic—view of what's going on. Doesn't happen. The adult characters are in evidence, but their adult perceptions and arguments aren't terribly convincing. Philosophically—ignoring for the moment the explicit sex and violence—this is a kids' book. It's keyed right into kids' concerns, but it's marketed as an adult novel. It is an unusual and probably insoluble situation.

I should mention there's available a simultaneous hardback edition varying somewhat from the Pocket Books release in both title and text *Crucifax Autumn* (Dark Harvest, \$18.95, 326 pp., ISBN 0-913165-29-8). It's still the same book, but retains a couple of genuine lunch-loser scenes Pocket requested be toned down. Read this version and you'll never view either abortion or French kissing quite the same way again.

This has been a good year for readers of John Shirley, what with his

horror novel, *In Darkness Waiting*, the political sf novel, *Eclipse Penumbra*, and now *A Splendid Chaos* (Franklin Watts, \$17.95, 359 pp., ISBN 0-531-15065-8). This new book is a coruscating cathartic wheel, by turns high adventure, political commentary, and transformational philosophy.

A Splendid Chaos starts off superb-



ly askew when hapless young Martin Wirth—Zero—is abducted in a fake disco and hurled light-years away to a planet called by its human inhabitants, Fool's Hope. The book never looks back. Fool's Hope has been populated with representatives of dozens of intelligent species by the enigmatic Meta. Either the playing out of cruel sociological games, or the proving of some strange cultural truth, seems to be the Meta goal. In either case, it means dire peril for Zero and his companions.

There is again a certain adolescent sensibility at play in these pages; but unlike *Crucifax*, *A Splendid Chaos* balances that tendency with an increasingly mature perspective as the story progresses. If there's a weakness here, it's the characters' occasional propensity for speaking in neat political or philosophical set-pieces. All the rest of the time they come across as real-life Jills and Joes, affectingly trapped in a world they never made. The book's strongest asset is John Shirley's fertile, never-slacking imagination which unfolds the world of Fool's Hope in a manic catalog of incredible detail. If you're an older—oops, mature—reader, this novel may stir memories of Jack Vance's *Big Planet* and *The Green Odyssey* by Philip José

Farmer. If you're a creature of the eighties, well, dude, you'll likely discover that *A Splendid Chaos* is the finest post-punk, politically aware, non-stop, power-punched, picaresque skiffy adventure of the year. No fooling.

Short Takes

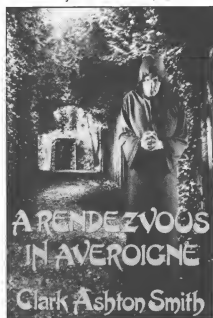
It's not just nostalgia, it's worth reading. Arkham House has just published *A Rendezvous in Averogne* by Clark Ashton Smith (\$22.95, 473 pp., ISBN 0-87054-156-0). Here are thirty tales selected from various volumes by arguably the best writer of the great *Weird Tales* triad that also included Lovecraft and Howard. Here are the preferred texts, along with illustrations by J.K. Potter and an introduction by Ray Bradbury. This is one of those basic fantasy volumes everyone should own and read.

Of the various best-of-the-year anthologies, the most comprehensive (and the best buy for words-to-dollars) is Gardner Dozois's *The Year's Best Science Fiction—Fifth Annual Collection* (St. Martin's, \$12.95, 678 pp., ISBN 0-312-01854-1). There are twenty-eight stories here, a quarter million words from 1987. All the biggies are included, plus a number you probably won't have found on your own. The editor also contributes a terrifically comprehensive summary of everything of note that happened in the sf field. Yours truly has complained publicly that Mr. Dozois's knowledge of the year's output in film wasn't as informed as his other areas of considerable expertise. So he asked me to come up with a list of 1987's most interesting sf and fantasy films, which he then kindly included. Naturally I blew it, including a film that was one of the big hits of 1986. I can only plead premature Alzheimer's. Or simple stupidity. So all of you, please, turn to page xxiii and make the following change: strike *Star Trek IV* and add *Raising Arizona*. Thank you kindly. Oh, and read every word of the fiction. It will give you a pretty definitive idea of what's happening of interest in contemporary sf short fiction.

George R. R. Martin's *Wild Cards* series continues to be one of the more interesting shared-world anthologies. The newest volume is *IV: Aces Abroad* (Bantam Spectra, \$4.50, 467 pp., ISBN 0-553-27628-X). The premise here is to examine a contemporary world much like our own in which a few folks have super-powers. People with beneficial abilities are called Aces; ones with negative gifts are Jokers. The present volume contains ten stories in which a Congressional junket, accompanied by a variety

of Jokers and Aces, travels around the world, examining the effect of the gene-altering Wild Card Virus in other cultures. Some of the best writing is contributed by editor Martin in his interstitial material. While there are a number of other first-rate pieces, perhaps the most interesting is "Blood Rights" by newcomer Leanne C. Harper, a tale of Central American *Indio* revolution and Mayan myth. Hers isn't the most successful piece of writing in the book—it reads much like a portion and outline of a projected novel—but it is the one that most clearly hews to the assignment: examine a non-American culture and assay the effect of a horrendously mutagenic force. It is a fine job of exploring a—to most of us—alien society from the inside out.

Finally, though it technically isn't fantasy or sf, here's a wonderful associational item by a man long immersed in science fiction. It's *The Map, or Rediscovering Rock and Roll* by Paul Williams (And Books, \$9.95, 269 pp., ISBN 0-89708-166-8), founder of the Philip K. Dick Society. Here Williams, creator of



Crawdaddy!, author of *Outlaw Blues*, and, in the opinion of most, the pioneer of modern rock journalism, has written a beautifully evocative and very personal account of faith regained. The faith referred to is not religious, but rather belief in the power of music, specifically rock. Williams lost track of that potent American musical current in the seventies, and then rediscovered it the decade following. The difficult art of the extended personal essay has been neglected. *The Map* is a top-notch example of how to do it right. ■

CRONENBERG

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 69

CRONENBERG: No. We weren't religious. What they might be detecting is that I'm very medieval. Medieval literature and imagery have always appealed to me: The medieval sensibility in which death was a very real character, the idea of purification. That entire culture was fixated on death and sexuality, and it produced some incredible art and imagery. For me, original sin exists in a totally non-Catholic way in the sense that we're born with something heavy hanging over us. The first time you tell your kid that everybody dies is a stunning moment, and it's not a moment that's inevitable. When you're a kid you don't necessarily think that everybody dies. You have to learn it and assimilate it. In a sense, that's the moment of original sin.

TZ: The other-ness of the female is another medieval theme, and I suppose it's inevitable in a film about gynecologists. It's also a potentially explosive theme.

CRONENBERG: I don't want to defuse it, but the response to the movie has been very *undivided* along sexual lines, which is unusual for my films. There usually is a sexual division. Because it's really about the twins forming a perfect unit, so everyone else in the film is "the other." But yes, women, in particular, are "other."

TZ: Wasn't one of the brothers a homosexual in the original novel?

CRONENBERG: I got rid of the homosexuality because I think it was a mistake, dramatically speaking.

TZ: Isn't the name Beverly, which is sexually ambiguous, a vestige of the homosexual theme?

CRONENBERG: Yes, Beverly is the more "female" of the two, and the name reflects that, but I think introducing explicit homosexuality would twist the movie into something it isn't. **TZ:** You've said that *Dead Ringers* isn't a horror film and that it isn't science fiction, that it's much more naturalistic than your previous films. But as usual you have quite a bit of surrealistic imagery in the film.

CRONENBERG: Well, you know me. [Laughs] I have some amusement with the notion that there's such a thing as realistic or naturalistic filmmaking. It's all an illusion, and I always play with that. I suppose what we're really saying is that it's

not a genre film. But a lot of people find it very scary and horrifying.

TZ: What about the technology of making a film in which the lead actor plays a dual role? Did you utilize any new techniques?

CRONENBERG: The principal of it hasn't changed very much. We use two pieces of film that we combine on the optical bench. You still have to lock the camera down. But because we have a "motion control" camera [a camera controlled by computer], we can repeat camera movements exactly. In essence it's a "moving, locked-off" camera. So you have a dolly shot with your twins walking toward you down a corridor. You can pan from one to the other. Interestingly enough though, I saw a clip from a Laurel and Hardy movie which showed two sets of Laurel and Hardys walking. How did they do it? They had the actors on a treadmill with rear projection of a background that receded. So even years ago you could accomplish the effect, if you were clever enough.

TZ: Why has it taken two-and-a-half years to get *Dead Ringers* going? You were coming off a hit with *The Fly*.

CRONENBERG: It wasn't that I wasn't getting offers. But I was being offered safe projects. People didn't want this film because it wasn't safe, which is why I wanted to make it.

TZ: Did Fox ever offer you the third *Alien* film?

CRONENBERG: Let me put it this way. When I told my agent what I was interested in doing, he said, "So I guess I might as well not even offer you *Aliens III*." I don't know if that means he was approached to approach me. But I wasn't interested.

TZ: If you can deal with the inevitable last question, what are you planning to do next? You've talked about a film adaptation of William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*.

CRONENBERG: I've made an agreement with Jeremy Thomas, producer of *The Last Emperor*, to make *Naked Lunch*, which has been up in the air for a long time. But I don't know if I'll come up with a "filmable" script.

TZ: Is it safe to say that you won't be directing anything you haven't also written?

CRONENBERG: I wouldn't say it's safe. You always hope a script will come along that's so compellingly right that you can't resist it. But the chances of that happening are pretty slim.

"Twins have a relationship which is so close and so inextricably intertwined that it reminds us of marriages and the link between parents and children."

Dead Ringers, 1988

PHOTO BY ATILLA DORY



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